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## A RAND NOTE

**The Great Strategy Debate:  
NATO's Evolution in the 1960s**

**Richard L. Kugler**

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**Richard L. Kugler**

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## **PREFACE**

The 1960s were an especially important decade in the history of both NATO and the Cold War, one that set the stage for many of the events in European security affairs that were to follow in the 1970s and 1980s. During this decade, the West was confronted with the unpleasant fact that the Soviet Union was acquiring an invulnerable nuclear deterrent of its own. This long-feared development undermined NATO's military strategy of massive retaliation, which had rested on U.S. nuclear dominance over the Soviet Union. As a result, NATO was compelled to search for a new strategy that was better suited to the nuclear age and relied considerably more on flexible response and strong conventional defenses in Central Europe.

This study seeks to determine whether, to what degree, and why the Alliance was successful in crafting an appropriate military strategy and fielding the kind of forces that were required to execute it. The explanatory portion of this study examines the painful process of debate that the Alliance underwent during the 1960s. It directs particular attention to the political interaction between the United States, the principal exponent of strategy reform, and its often-recalcitrant West European allies. The normative part examines the policy outputs of this decade—strategy and forces—in relation to the West's evolving security requirements in Europe.

The material in this Note is part of a book on the historical evolution of NATO's security policy, defense strategy, and military forces being written for The Ford Foundation under the project "History of NATO's Conventional Defense Forces and Strategy." Part of the support also came from RAND using its own funds.



## SUMMARY

Although the West certainly benefited from the Soviet Union's attempt to impose an unnatural order on Europe, a favorable outcome was by no means predetermined or achieved by happenstance. This Note puts forth the hypothesis that the West succeeded not only because it forged an alliance to contest the Soviet Union for control of Europe's destiny, but also because it made NATO work. In essence, NATO's members surmounted the constraints facing them to forge and then execute a coherent grand strategy, security policy, defense strategy, and military posture. This does not imply that the West performed perfectly or that success was achieved overnight. What it means is that the Alliance slowly but surely mastered the difficult art of coalition planning. As a result, a quite stable balance of power was maintained in Central Europe, bringing a security to the Western side that enabled it to maintain its unity and to prosper economically. Meanwhile, the Soviet bloc was denied access to Western resources and was exposed as being politically illegitimate and economically ineffective.

With this hypothesis in mind, this Note examines NATO's evolution in the 1960s, a critical decade in the Alliance's 40 year history. This decade saw a sustained U.S. effort to alter NATO's military strategy in the direction of flexible response and stronger conventional forces in Central Europe. This effort was launched by the Kennedy administration in 1961-1963 and carried forth by the Johnson administration in 1963-1968. Along the way the United States consistently found itself confronting the difficult task of persuading its often-doubtful West European allies to follow its lead. Consequently, the 1960s were a decade in which Alliance politics were conducted with a particular intensity that befitted the great issues at stake. Despite some bruising setbacks, for the most part the results were beneficial for NATO's long-term survival. If the 1950s saw the foundations of the Alliance laid, the 1960s were a period of erecting the girders, wallboards, and superstructure.

## BACKGROUND

The evolutionary path that the Alliance followed in its first decade set the stage for the challenges that NATO faced as the 1960s dawned.<sup>1</sup> In essence, the Alliance started

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<sup>1</sup>Richard L. Kugler, *Laying the Foundations: The Evolution of NATO in the 1950s*, RAND, N-3105-FF/RC, June 1990.

off well in the early 1950s by creating an integrated military structure, securing a lasting U.S. military presence in Central Europe, accepting U.S. leadership on strategy, and agreeing on the rearmament of West Germany. Having launched itself on the path of a sustained military buildup in Central Europe, however, it dramatically switched gears in the mid-1950s. Influenced by fiscal considerations and by the belief that nuclear weapons could deter all forms of aggression, it wholeheartedly embraced the U.S.-designed nuclear strategy (MC 14/2) that called for massive retaliation against nearly any provocation and relegated conventional defenses to the sidelines. By the end of the 1950s, NATO's nuclear forces had grown immeasurably stronger, but the ability of a nuclear strategy to protect Western Europe was increasingly being called into question. Meanwhile, NATO's conventional forces were left far too weak to meet the threats that loomed on the horizon, threats that nuclear forces alone could not safely handle. The task facing the Alliance in the new decade was to rectify this imbalance in its strategy and forces.

## **THE ROAD TO PROGRESS**

The process of alliance politics that unfolded in the 1960s as the Western allies came to grips with this dangerous situation can be divided into three phases. First came the Kennedy administration's provocative call for strategy reform in 1961-1962, a step that touched off enormous internal debate because it went against the grain of Allied political, strategic, and economic sentiments. Next came a period of conflict resolution and consensus formation, stretching from 1963 to 1966, in which the Alliance members searched for common ground on military strategy and force requirements. Finally, there came a period of decisionmaking and policy execution, lasting through early 1969.

The results of this process were by no means entirely favorable to NATO's cohesion or its security. The debates of the early 1960s badly strained the Alliance's internal unity, undermining U.S. relations with its three major West European allies: Britain, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), and France. The consensus building process of the mid-1960s helped heal these wounds but fell well short of being totally curative. In particular, France, under Charles de Gaulle, withdrew from NATO's military structure in 1966, angrily denouncing American leadership of the Alliance. U.S.-FRG relations were restored to greater normalcy, but even here problems remained, with both sides echoing complaints about each other's fidelity. Meanwhile, an ominous

development was taking place on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Although issuing calls for détente, the Soviet Union had embarked on a sustained military buildup of its own, one that threatened to overtake the West in future years. Together, these developments boded ill for the coming decades.

Notwithstanding these setbacks, the 1960s on balance were a decade of major progress for NATO. Most important, the NATO allies resolved their debates over military doctrine. First came agreement on nuclear sharing and command relationships, an accord that largely resolved concerns over extended deterrence and the commitment of U.S. strategic nuclear forces to Western Europe's security. This accord paved the way to the landmark 1967 NATO decision to abandon its nuclear doctrine and to adopt instead a new strategy of flexible response (MC 14/3). Although itself far from perfect, this strategy restored balance to NATO's security policy by calling for greater emphasis on conventional defenses without improperly downgrading reliance on nuclear retaliation. In achieving this balance, MC 14/3 helped restore NATO's unity while erecting a better deterrent shield against the growing Soviet military threat.

Spurred on by its strategy deliberations, NATO also made important progress in bolstering both its nuclear and conventional forces during the course of the decade. As Table S.1 shows, NATO's nuclear forces grew steadily in the 1960s, a product of U.S. modernization of its strategic posture and NATO's deployment of tactical nuclear

Table S.1

THE NUCLEAR BALANCE IN EUROPE

	U.S./NATO		Soviet/Warsaw Pact	
	1961	1969	1961	1969
<b>Strategic nuclear forces</b>				
ICBMs	120	1,054	0-50	858
SLBMs	32	720	25-75	565
Bombers	1,800	600	175	155
Total	1,952	2,374	200-300	1,578
<b>Theater delivery systems</b>				
Tube artillery	100	600	0	0
Surface-surface missiles	200	200	50	250
Nuclear capable aircraft	400	550	250	425
Total	700	1,350	300	675

artillery tubes and other theater systems to Central Europe. To be sure, Soviet nuclear forces grew stronger as well, thereby ending all hopes that the West could maintain the kind of massive nuclear superiority that it had enjoyed in the 1950s. But the West's own nuclear forces remained powerful enough at least to ensure that they could play the role assigned to them in NATO's military strategy and that the Soviet Union could not acquire any exploitable form of superiority for itself.

In a less publicly visible but no less important way, NATO's conventional forces in Central Europe grew stronger as well. In 1959, the Alliance fielded only some 17 division equivalents in peacetime, a level that would have expanded very slowly upon mobilization and outside reinforcement from the United States. By 1969, as Table S.2 shows, NATO's strength had enlarged to 24 divisions in Central Europe in peacetime, a number that would have grown to 37 divisions after about a month of mobilization and reinforcement. This important development was due mostly to two trends. First, the management reforms instituted by U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara strengthened the ability of the U.S. Army to reinforce Central Europe from the United States. Second, progress on the FRG's long-delayed rearmament program resulted in the deployment of a large, 12-division, first-class West German Army that fundamentally transformed NATO's previously precarious military situation in Central Europe.

In addition to this quantitative expansion, the Alliance's forces also improved qualitatively through modernization, readiness, and sustainability upgrades. An Alliance-wide effort to configure NATO's forces for modern mechanized warfare more than doubled NATO's inventory of tanks, armored personnel carriers, self-propelled artillery, and antitank weapons during this decade. Also, NATO's air forces improved considerably by acquiring aircraft and munitions more capable of contributing to the ground battle.

Table S.2

EVOLUTION OF NATO's GROUND FORCES  
IN CENTRAL EUROPE  
(Division equivalents)

Year	M-Day	M+10	M+30/45	M+60	M+90
1949	9	12	14	16	19
1959	17	20	22	28	40
1969	24	29	37	45	52

All told, NATO's posture improved by about 75 percent, and possibly more. Equally important, NATO's forces, which had been oriented primarily toward fighting a nuclear war, made major strides toward learning how to wage a purely conventional war by developing new doctrine, tactics, and concepts. In doing so, they reshaped NATO's military strategy in a highly practical way.

This buildup did not solve all of the West's defense problems, however. During the 1960s, the Alliance learned a great deal more about the nature of the NATO/Warsaw Pact force balance in Central Europe resulting in a new appraisal that punctured the myth of overwhelming Soviet military dominance and elevated NATO's prospects for conducting a successful conventional defense. When all myths were cast aside, NATO was left still facing the daunting prospect of a Warsaw Pact attack of about 90 heavily armed divisions, enough to launch an all-out conventional attack on West Germany aimed at decisive victory. By 1969, NATO's posture at M+30 would have been large enough to meet the requirements of a nuclear strategy (30 divisions) for confronting this threat, but it still would have fallen well short of the 50-60 division level that NATO's studies and force goals postulated as being necessary for a purely conventional defense. Even judged by the more realistic standards of the day, NATO's posture still fell well short of full adequacy.

Even so, NATO's buildup had altered the military balance in Central Europe. Although by 1959 NATO's forces had begun to be a factor in the deterrence equation, the Soviets still could have defeated them fairly easily and taken their time about it. By 1969, the Soviets could not have afforded to mobilize leisurely, thereby giving the United States time to reinforce NATO to the point where it could not have been beaten, especially quickly. To catch NATO unprepared, the Soviets would have been forced to mobilize their forces and deploy many of them from the rear areas to the inter-German border within a few weeks. This promised to strain their training regimens and transport capacity, possibly beyond their limits. And even had they managed to execute a speedy buildup, NATO still would not have been a pushover. A difficult fight would have loomed ahead.

At the time, Western experts disagreed about whether, and to what degree, the Soviet Union still enjoyed a military advantage in Central Europe. Senior U.S. and Allied military officers, aware of NATO's deficiencies, remained doubtful about the Alliance's prospects. McNamara, armed with statistics that displayed NATO's hidden

advantages in weapon quality, air power, and support structures, was a good deal more optimistic. But civilians and military officers alike seemed in agreement on one crucial point. Although NATO still had reason to doubt itself, the Soviets themselves now confronted the prospect of serious uncertainty, risks, and costs in a conventional war. For this reason, NATO, although failing to fully rectify the balance, doubtless succeeded in upping its margin of conventional deterrence.

Equally significant, NATO enhanced its ability to execute a forward defense of West Germany. In the early 1950s, NATO's military authorities expected at best to defend along the Rhine River, thereby ceding most of West German territory to a Soviet invader. Even as late as 1959, NATO still planned to establish its initial defense positions well into West Germany and then to conduct a terrain-yielding mobile defense. As the German Army appeared and NATO's forces improved, the Alliance's defense plans changed. In the 1960s, at Germany's insistence, NATO moved its defense line forward to the inter-German border itself, established a layer-cake array of strong corps sectors, and planned to yield ground only minimally for purely tactical purposes. No hollow act of bravado, this step, which was formally embodied in MC 14/3, was taken as an act of responsible military planning. In a highly visible way, it reflected NATO's growing self-confidence.

The Alliance's adoption of a forward defense concept, of course, did not guarantee that NATO's forces in fact could protect all of the FRG's territory against a full-scale Soviet attack. But the act of formally committing itself to the attempt had a salutary effect in West Germany, a nation that had long sought to be a good ally but had remained chronically uncertain about whether NATO's security umbrella actually would extend over it in a moment of crisis. With this reassurance came a growing West German commitment to NATO and enhanced confidence in American leadership of the Alliance. Along with this stance, in turn, came a greater willingness to alter NATO's military strategy in ways that accommodated the previously controversial U.S. demand for a flexible response.

In addition to producing a greater West German willingness to compromise on defense strategy, NATO's buildup produced the military forces that made a flexible response physically possible. The core idea behind flexible response was to avoid nuclear escalation entirely if feasible, to delay it as long as possible if not, and then to undertake it in a carefully controlled, measured way. Regardless of how desirable such a

strategy seemed to McNamara and many other strategists, it would not have been feasible had NATO's conventional forces not become capable of defending confidently at least for an initial period. NATO's buildup, while not fully guaranteeing Central Europe's security, at least accomplished this much. In doing so, it made MC 14/3's adoption possible. Equally important, it resolved what had been growing American doubts about the wisdom of continuing to provide extended nuclear deterrence coverage over Western Europe. Notwithstanding the Soviet Union's impending achievement of nuclear parity, the U.S. nuclear commitment to Western Europe, which many feared would evaporate, therefore remained intact.

In addition to enhancing deterrence, NATO's military buildup and adoption of MC 14/3 cemented both the West German and the U.S. commitment to the Alliance and transformed these nations into even closer allies than before. This achievement was partially offset by France's estrangement from NATO's integrated command, a serious blow. But this loss aside, NATO's internal unity grew. In many ways, of course, NATO's military forces still suffered from important deficiencies and exploitable vulnerabilities. The task of building the Alliance therefore had not yet been completed. But two major strategic risks had been largely eliminated: that the Soviets might feel confident enough of their prospects to launch an invasion and that the Alliance, rent by internal political fissures, might succumb to external pressures by collapsing from within. As the 1960s ended, deterrence and containment consequently remained intact, and the West, under the protection of an increasingly strong security umbrella, was left free to pursue the other important component of its grand strategy in Europe: the building of an increasingly integrated western community of nations. As a result, the Alliance exited the 1960s with greater confidence in its ability to meet the challenges ahead.

How did the Soviet Union react to this achievement? While the truth lies hidden in Moscow's archives, it is likely that the Soviet Union's sudden endorsement of détente and its simultaneous launching of an ambitious military buildup were both driven by a desire to derail NATO's train. In this sense, the East-West competition in Europe had not yet ended. But at the same time, crises in Europe, once normal in the Cold War, had become a thing of the past. Following its rebuffs over Berlin in 1961 and Cuba in 1962, the Soviet Union had ceased its periodic resort to confrontational politics in Europe. From the mid-1960s onward, it increasingly turned to more peaceful means of competition, and the Cold War in Europe, once regarded as a likely flash point for an East-West military clash, began diminishing in intensity.

Moscow's disavowal of crude pressure tactics doubtless sprang partly from the fact that the Soviet government, having been deeply frightened by the Cuban missile crisis, genuinely welcomed the olive branch that President Kennedy began extending it in 1963. But in all likelihood, the Soviet Union's new behavior also stemmed partly from its realization that NATO was simply no longer vulnerable to bullying tactics. To the extent this is the case, NATO, by attending to its security needs, went a long way toward winning the Cold War in the 1960s. By ensuring that NATO was too strong politically and militarily to be bludgeoned into submission, the West helped set the stage for the Cold War's end two decades later when the Warsaw Pact collapsed from its own internal contradictions.

The Alliance's achievements in the 1960s owed much to the leadership that the United States exerted in those turbulent years, especially to the courage of President Kennedy and the aggressiveness of Robert McNamara. Both men recognized that in transatlantic affairs, leadership is not measured by the absence of strain, equilibrium is not necessarily a sign of good health, and ferment can be an engine of renewal. Because of their efforts and those of others, aided by the cooperation of several West European nations, the United States achieved its purposes and the Alliance as a whole benefited. The lesson here is rather simple but yet might turn out to be profoundly important in the years ahead: Success is the product of both vision and sustained commitment to purpose.



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## I. INTRODUCTION

The decade of the 1960s saw a sustained U.S. effort to alter NATO's military strategy in the direction of flexible response and stronger conventional forces in Central Europe. This effort was launched by the Kennedy administration in the early 1960s and then carried forth by the Johnson administration in 1963-1968. Along the way, the United States found itself facing the difficult task of persuading its often-doubtful West European allies to follow its lead. As a result, in that decade Alliance politics were conducted with an intensity that befitted the great issues at stake.

The events of this decade were influenced by the mixed legacy inherited from the 1950s, a brief review of which is in order here. The first half of the 1950s saw NATO make major strides forward. In particular, the Alliance established an integrated military structure, secured the commitment of large U.S. and Allied forces to Western Europe's defense, adopted the ambitious Lisbon force goals of 1952, forged the landmark transatlantic bargain in the 1954 Paris Agreement, and launched the rearmament of West Germany. These steps seemed to set the stage for a sustained NATO military buildup in Central Europe, one that would field not only nuclear forces but also a viable conventional posture for protecting this critical region.

From 1955 onward, however, NATO's conventional defense efforts slackened considerably as the Alliance, following the U.S. example, increasingly turned toward nuclear weapons to provide deterrence on the cheap. From 1955 to 1960, NATO's nuclear defenses grew immeasurably stronger, a development that led NATO in 1957 to adopt MC 14/2, a nuclear strategy of massive retaliation that relied primarily on theater-deployed nuclear weapons and the U.S. Strategic Air Command to achieve deterrence. But NATO's conventional programs slowed down to the point where, by the decade's end, the Alliance's posture still fell well short of requirements for containing a major Warsaw Pact attack.

MC 14/2 was based on the assumption that, given the West's nuclear superiority over the Soviet Union, the threat of nuclear retaliation would confidently deter all forms of enemy aggression. The problem with this calculus was that it overlooked the rapid strides the Soviet Union itself was making toward building a large, survivable nuclear force of its own. By 1960, it had become apparent that if the Soviets had not already

checkmated the West's nuclear superiority, they eventually would do so. This promised to leave the Soviets with an exploitable conventional superiority in Central Europe, one that they might choose to employ in the confidence that the West would back down from running the now-mutual risks of nuclear escalation. MC 14/2 offered no credible solution to this problem.

The result was that the 1950s ended on an unhappy note. To be sure, NATO had a powerful nuclear posture. In strictly quantitative terms, its conventional defenses themselves were fully four times stronger than in 1950, and they were beginning to become a factor in the deterrence equation. But because of the simultaneous Soviet/Warsaw Pact military buildup, NATO found itself facing a frustrating, still precarious geostrategic situation. At a minimum, Western Europe was left psychologically vulnerable to Soviet intimidation, pressure tactics, and blackmail in peacetime. And in wartime, it could have found itself facing a stark choice between surrender and suicide.<sup>1</sup>

The 1960s were to witness a troubled search for solutions to this vulnerability, one that saw intense Alliance-wide debate over the balance that should be struck between nuclear weapons and conventional defenses. This decade produced an era of internal stress as the United States, often in the face of West European misgivings, tried to lead the Alliance toward a refashioning of NATO's military strategy and force posture. To some degree, the entire process damaged the Alliance's unity; in particular, it contributed to France's decision to leave NATO's integrated military structure. Along the way, however, the Alliance—at U.S. instigation but with the consent of most West European nations—also made several decisions for the better. Most important, NATO settled on a new military strategy that has endured, and substantially bolstered both its nuclear and conventional forces in Central Europe. When the dust had settled, as a result, the Alliance left the 1960s in far better military shape than it had been in at the decade's onset. The results were manifested directly in East-West relations as the late 1960s saw a perceptible lessening of Cold War tensions in Central Europe and a growing willingness by the Soviet Union to accommodate itself to NATO's existence.

The 1960s thus were a time of stress but also progress. If the 1950s were a decade in which the West laid down the foundations of a strong NATO alliance, the 1960s can

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<sup>1</sup>For details of NATO's strategy and posture in the 1950s see Richard L. Kugler, *Laying the Foundations: The Evolution of NATO in the 1950s*, RAND, N-3105-FF/RC, June 1990.

best be characterized as a period in which many of the girders, wall braces, and superstructure were built. This study tells the tale of how this decade unfolded and what results it produced. Section II describes the Kennedy administration's views on military strategy and its efforts to bolster U.S. conventional defenses. Sections III-VI examine the tortuous course of Alliance politics from 1962-1967, during which the United States set out to forge a consensus behind its strategy ideas. These sections describe not only NATO's debates over military strategy but also the Alliance's efforts to reach an accord on nuclear sharing arrangements, without which a strategy consensus would not have been possible. Sections VII-X analyze the military outputs of this period: the new strategy of flexible response (MC 14/3) that was adopted in 1967 and the nuclear and conventional force improvement efforts that the Alliance implemented during these years. Section XI provides an assessment of lessons learned.

## II. REVOLUTION IN AMERICAN MILITARY STRATEGY

Complaints against massive retaliation and MC 14/2 had begun mounting, on both sides of the Atlantic, long before Kennedy entered the White House in early 1961. Dissatisfaction with the policy ran especially high within the U.S. Army. Although the Air Force and Navy had fared well under Eisenhower's nuclear strategy, the Army had been relegated to a secondary status and was left largely incapable of fighting any major war other than a nuclear conflict. As far back as the mid-1950s, General Maxwell Taylor and other senior U.S. Army officers had been expressing disagreement with this situation.<sup>1</sup> Citing the Korean conflict and other hot spots around the globe, they voiced doubt that nuclear forces would deter all forms of aggression, or that the United States readily would escalate if confronted with a limited, nonnuclear attack. They also expressed skepticism that, even in a nuclear war, nuclear weapons would reduce the need for flexible and diverse ground forces. Their answer to these problems was a larger Army and a change in both U.S. and NATO military strategy. In the late 1950s Taylor had resigned his post as Army Chief of Staff to make his complaints public. By the time Kennedy took office, he and other disgruntled Army officers were eager to help the new administration reform U.S. strategy by bolstering American conventional defenses.

In a less vocal way the Supreme Allied Commanders, Europe (SACEURs) of the late 1950s lent their own weight to these arguments. General Gruenther, SACEUR from 1954-1957, had taken pride in the progress that NATO had made in building better conventional defenses in Central Europe and viewed the shift toward nuclear weapons with some misgivings. His successor, General Norstad, presided over NATO's nuclear buildup with greater enthusiasm and was a vocal advocate of further enhancements, including deployment of a medium range ballistic missile (MRBM) on European soil. But he also recognized that nuclear forces might not be appropriate for all contingencies and that even in the event of a full-scale Soviet invasion, NATO might prefer to defend conventionally for a limited period. Accordingly, he advocated the "pause" concept, which called for enough ground and air forces to delay the Soviets for at least long enough to determine that escalation was NATO's only alternative for protecting its

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<sup>1</sup>See Maxwell Taylor, *The Uncertain Trumpet*, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1960.

security. This led him to urge that NATO should aspire to field 30 active divisions in Central Europe, the number officially endorsed by NATO's force goals then.<sup>2</sup>

In Europe, most Allied governments initially had been ambivalent about massive retaliation. But under Eisenhower's leadership, by 1961 they had grown comfortable with a nuclear strategy and the budgetary advantages it offered. This stance, however, was not shared by all politically influential factions within these nations. In the FRG, Chancellor Adenauer, Defense Minister Franz Joseph Strauss, and other figures of the conservative CDU/CSU (Christian Demokratische Union/Christlich Soziale Union) government still supported MC 14/2. The young generation of SPD (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands) leaders then coming into political maturity, however, were inclined to be critical of NATO's nuclear strategy. For example, Helmut Schmidt, who would later rise to become chancellor, called for a greater emphasis on conventional preparedness. A similar pattern prevailed elsewhere in Europe. The idea of a more flexible NATO strategy primarily found a home among moderate liberals, some of whom, while not yet in power, were beginning to have a say in their nations' policies.

Within the United States support for this idea had spread by 1960 to the rising breed of civilian defense intellectuals who were coming to populate the universities and academic "think tanks." For example, William W. Kaufmann had written an influential critique of massive retaliation several years before.<sup>3</sup> At RAND, he and other RAND colleagues were arguing in favor of a more flexible nuclear doctrine and beefed-up conventional forces. In a similar vein, Henry A. Kissinger, then a scholar at Harvard and the Council of Foreign Relations, was advocating both better theater nuclear defenses and stronger conventional forces.<sup>4</sup> Other scholars, all dwelling on the risks and requirements of limited war, were echoing parallel themes. These civilian strategists by no means agreed on exactly how the United States and NATO should proceed, but they were united in their criticism of massive retaliation.

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<sup>2</sup>See Robert S. Jordan (ed.), *Generals in International Politics: NATO's Supreme Allied Commander, Europe*, University of Kentucky Press, Lexington, 1987. Chapters 3 and 4 cover Gruenther's and Norstad's views.

<sup>3</sup>See William W. Kaufmann, "The Requirements of Deterrence," Princeton Center of International Studies, Memorandum No. 7, November 15, 1954.

<sup>4</sup>See Henry A. Kissinger, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1957. Also see Kissinger, *The Necessity for Choice*, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1960.

The rising chorus of dissent in America and Europe had led the Eisenhower administration to acknowledge that limited aggression should be met by a nonnuclear response. But Eisenhower never abandoned his primary emphasis on nuclear weapons or his support of fiscal restraint in defense spending. Kennedy had criticized the Eisenhower administration on both accounts during his presidential campaign and promised to overturn this legacy. He was bothered by the prospect of the small "brush-fire" conflicts that the United States might be called upon to fight in distant corners of the globe, but he was also concerned about NATO and its military dilemmas. The answer to both problems, he publicly maintained, was stronger conventional defenses and less reliance on nuclear escalation. Kennedy thus entered office not only with advice from many security experts to forge a revolution in the West's military thinking but also with a firm desire of his own to move in this direction.

Kennedy's determination to bring greater coherence to U.S. defense strategy and national security policy was reflected in his efforts to centralize decisionmaking in these areas. Kennedy was intent on being an activist president, one who would not be captive to the government bureaucracies. He relied heavily on McGeorge Bundy, his National Security Adviser, and the White House staff to provide alternative sources of advice and fresh perspectives. He also turned regularly to his energetic Secretary of Defense, Robert S. McNamara, who himself was embarked on an ambitious program to strengthen civilian control and centralize planning in the Pentagon. The combination of Bundy and McNamara, along with a coterie of other advisers, helped Kennedy counterbalance the more traditional views of the State and Defense departments and played a major role in the innovative policy decisions made during his administration.

These institutional changes notwithstanding, Kennedy's initial defense program and budget decisions were focused not on conventional defense, but rather on bolstering the U.S. nuclear forces. Kennedy had inherited from Eisenhower an FY62 defense budget of only \$44.9 billion. In the initial weeks after taking office, he bolstered this budget to \$51.0 billion, a dramatic 13.6 percent increase. Nearly \$2 billion of this increase went to the strategic nuclear forces, a large amount by the standards of the day. The steps that he approved included faster production of Minuteman intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and Polaris submarines, higher alert rates for B-52 bombers, and a strengthened national command and control system. The Polaris and Minuteman measures were particularly noteworthy because they promised to substantially enlarge



the U.S. offensive missile force. To many observers, these decisions suggested, not change, but continuity in U.S. military strategy.

What, then, were Kennedy, McNamara, Bundy and the others up to? Although historians will debate this issue for many years, the answer seems to be that initial appearances were misleading. Beyond doubt, Kennedy and McNamara felt a sense of urgency about the need to shore up the U.S. nuclear posture, and they were willing to launch expensive programs for this purpose. But these decisions were not representative of their long-term goals for U.S. military strategy. What they wanted, over the long term, was to fashion a more balanced strategy that made sense in the coming era of mutual nuclear deterrence. This strategy called for strong nuclear forces, but it also called for the transfer of greater overall responsibility to the conventional forces.<sup>5</sup>

To be sure, this shift in priorities did not seem to be the case at first, but it started becoming apparent by the end of Kennedy's first year in office. At that time, the Kennedy administration released its first defense budget, which unveiled a comprehensive plan for bolstering the U.S. conventional posture. In succeeding years, the Kennedy administration's sense of direction was to become even more apparent as the nuclear buildup was tapered off and an increasingly large share of the budget was invested in the conventional forces. The magnitude of this trend is illustrated by Table 1, which displays how DoD funds were distributed between the strategic nuclear forces and the conventional forces during FY62-FY65, the budgets that the Kennedy administration

Table 1

DoD BUDGETS: FY1962-FY1965  
(Current \$, billions)

	1962	1963	1964	1965
Strategic nuclear forces	11.2	10.3	9.2	6.9
Conventional forces	20.5	21.0	21.4	21.9
Total DoD budget	51.0	52.2	52.5	52.4

<sup>5</sup>For an analysis of the Kennedy administration's military strategy, see William W. Kaufmann, *The McNamara Strategy*, Harper and Row, New York, 1964, Chs. 1 and 2.

shaped during its tenure. The share allocated to strategic forces shrank dramatically from 22 percent to only 13 percent of the DoD budget.<sup>6</sup>

Kennedy's early nuclear modernization program decisions were not aimed at restoring either U.S. nuclear supremacy over the Soviet Union or the massive retaliation strategy that had prevailed in the 1950s. Instead, they reflected more limited aims: a desire to render U.S. strategic forces invulnerable, to make them more flexible, and otherwise to configure them for the missile age. The distinction here is an important one, and because it sheds revealing light on the Kennedy administration's overall military strategy, it merits elaboration.

Since 1957 the Soviets had been actively testing ICBMs in ways that seemed to presage an early deployment, possibly in large numbers. Kennedy's early nuclear decisions were influenced heavily by his judgment that the Soviet Union was embarked on an upward nuclear path and the United States needed to react accordingly. This is not to say that Kennedy and McNamara were driven by fear of a "missile gap" or other ill-focused concerns that the Soviet Union had already acquired nuclear supremacy over the United States. The issue was not the present, but the future. Data at the time showed that despite earlier worry that a missile gap was emerging—a fear that Kennedy had openly played upon during his presidential campaign—the Soviets in fact had not yet begun deploying ICBMs in large numbers. As a result, Kennedy, upon entering office, found that the United States still enjoyed numerical preponderance over the Soviets and would remain superior at least for a time. But the long-term trends were less certain. The Soviets evidently already had a small missile force, and Pentagon planners believed that in future years they would very likely deploy a large inventory of ICBMs and submarine launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) and possibly a ballistic missile defense system as well. Although there were major uncertainties, the only issue was when and to what degree. The Soviets' past record—they had developed nuclear weapons and theater delivery systems much faster than the West originally estimated—hardly suggested that their performance now was likely to be either restrained or sluggish. As a result, the Kennedy administration still felt a sense of concern about the nuclear balance, one that led it to favor prompt action.

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<sup>6</sup>*Department of Defense Appropriations, 1966, Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Appropriations of the Committee on Armed Services, U.S. Senate, 89th Cong., 1st Sess. on H.R. 9221, Washington, D.C., 1965.*

A principal motivating factor was that the U.S. nuclear posture of 1961 was by no means problem free. The posture, by virtue of its heavy reliance on bombers stationed on a limited number of airbases, was disconcertingly vulnerable to even a small, crude Soviet ICBM strike. It was this vulnerability to preemption, rather than the missile gap, that lay behind Kennedy's urgency to deploy a sizable U.S. missile force. A large force of ICBMs and SLBMs promised both to eliminate the present risk and to make secure the U.S. retaliatory capability regardless of how fast Soviet missile programs unfolded in the future. The decision to deploy these missiles thus was heavily motivated by defensive objectives and was consistent with an overall strategy of deemphasizing nuclear weapons.

Kennedy's nuclear buildup did not reflect any serious expectation that a U.S. disarming capability over the Soviet Union—the hallmark of a nuclear strategy—somehow could be maintained, especially over the long run. At the time, as Table 2 shows, Soviet ICBM and SLBM forces were still quite small. As a result, Kennedy's missile deployment did produce a temporary U.S. superiority. But this advantage was more an accident of history than any foreordained American plan, a product of the failure of Soviet deployments to accelerate as fast as had been expected. The U.S. advantage also was a decidedly temporary one. Within two years, a Soviet missile deployment program was underway. By the mid-1960s, this buildup was to firmly

Table 2

U.S./SOVIET STRATEGIC NUCLEAR FORCE LEVELS<sup>a</sup>

	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968
<b>United States</b>								
ICBMs	120	120	250	650	900	1,054	1,054	1,054
SLBMs	32	80	144	272	400	528	656	656
Bombers	1,800	1,600	1,400	1,200	1,000	700	650	600
Total	1,952	1,800	1,794	2,122	2,300	2,282	2,360	2,310
<b>Soviet Union</b>								
ICBMs	0-25	25-75	90	190	224	292	570	858
SLBM/SLCMs	25-75	125	200	265	310	375	475	565
Bombers	175	175	175	165	160	155	155	155
Total	275	375	465	620	694	822	1,200	1,578

<sup>a</sup>U.S. data compiled from McNamara's posture statements and testimony, 1961-1968, and subsequent DoD publications. Soviet data taken from official DoD estimates made public in 1974.

establish the Soviet Union as a nuclear superpower. Eventually, the Soviets were to catch and then, in some ways, surpass the United States.

Even the meaning of the numerical advantage that the United States enjoyed in the early 1960s was itself suspect. A comparison of ICBM forces, in isolation, suggests that the United States might have gained a temporary ability to destroy the Soviet Union's small, vulnerable ICBM force in a surprise attack. But the Soviets also possessed an SLBM and bomber force, which would have been harder to destroy. Only a few of these forces would have been necessary to destroy many U.S. urban areas. Also, the Soviet Union possessed several hundred medium bombers and some medium and intermediate range ballistic missiles (MR/IRBMs), which could not have been prevented from devastating Western Europe, the area that the United States presumably would have been trying to protect by launching a missile attack in the first place. For this reason alone, the U.S. nuclear predominance of the early 1960s was more impressive in numbers than in strategic importance.

Kennedy and McNamara believed that the perpetuation of a U.S. disarming capacity was not a viable option regardless of how much money the United States was prepared to spend, and therefore it could not be the foundation of American military strategy. The Soviet nuclear program was simply too vigorous, and the alternatives open to the Soviets too broad, to render such a capability feasible. As a result, the United States needed to come to grips with the fact that its homeland was becoming vulnerable to a massive Soviet missile attack, either in retaliation or as a preemptive act. To Kennedy and McNamara, this was a given, if harsh, reality of modern international politics.<sup>7</sup>

This state of affairs left Kennedy and McNamara skeptical about the continued utility of nuclear weapons for any mission beyond nuclear deterrence. They placed little stock in the idea that nuclear "superiority"—measured in purely numerical terms—brought the West any diplomatic leverage in East-West relations. Further, they believed that although the threat of nuclear reprisal would deter any enemy nuclear attack, it might not deter enemy conventional aggression in Europe or elsewhere, especially if the West's conventional defenses were inadequate. They also dismissed the idea that the United States could confidently aspire to dominate the escalation process and emerge

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<sup>7</sup>See McNamara's testimony to the Congress during these years, multiple sources. See also Kaufmann, 1964.

unscathed. They personally doubted that nuclear escalation could be controlled once the nuclear threshold had been crossed. For this reason, they believed that once nuclear weapons were used, damage would far exceed the stakes in nearly any East-West crisis. This violated the most fundamental principle behind the use of force: that it serve intelligent political purposes. To them, nuclear war was to be avoided at almost all costs, and nuclear weapons were to be treated as instruments of last resort.

McNamara himself had a deep distaste for nuclear weapons. In the early 1980s, long after he had left office, he wrote that he had privately recommended to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson that the United States should not be prepared to resort to nuclear war even in the event of an impending conventional defeat in Europe. Whether McNamara would have adhered to this stance in an actual crisis cannot be determined, but this sentiment clearly reflected his strong fear of escalation and the destruction of nuclear war. McNamara's aversion went to the point that in private conversations with his personal aides, he rejected the thesis that nuclear weapons were beneficial because they scared both sides into exercising restraint. To him, any deterrence benefits that nuclear weapons provided were more than outweighed by the catastrophic damage that they would inflict if they ever were used.<sup>8</sup> While he acknowledged that the nuclear genie irretrievably had been let out of the bottle, he personally preferred the kind of military world that existed before Hiroshima.

None of this implies that Kennedy, McNamara, and other administration officials were opposed to intelligent programs that made the strategic forces more secure and flexible. Indeed, they sought to increase the nuclear posture's security and flexibility as part of their efforts to enhance stability, but these attitudes left them decidedly ill-disposed to massive retaliation. They rejected both of this strategy's central tenets: that the West should be readily prepared to initiate nuclear war in response to conventional aggression, and that it should immediately launch a single, crushing blow aimed at destroying not only enemy military forces, but cities as well. To them, exactly the opposite made sense.

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<sup>8</sup>Interview material. See also Robert S. McNamara, "The Military Role of Nuclear Weapons: Perceptions and Misperceptions," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 62, No. 1, Fall 1983, pp. 59-80. An important point here is that McNamara consistently separated his personal views from the obligations imposed on him by his office, which demanded conservative standards in setting U.S. defense policy.

Kennedy and McNamara believed that U.S. strategic forces should be viewed primarily as a means of retaliation rather than as instruments for launching a nuclear war. This did not mean that U.S. missiles never would be used in a first strike mode, especially in limited ways. Kennedy and McNamara had inherited a policy commitment to initiate nuclear war to defend Central Europe, if necessary. Aware that the West European allies placed great emphasis on this commitment, they continued to honor it rhetorically. But this concession to first use evidently was made more out of obligation than enthusiasm. Their overriding goal was to see the West's military strategy based on "second strike" nuclear principles.

With respect to targeting doctrine, Kennedy and McNamara both believed that U.S. forces should be designed in light of the possibility that they actually might have to be used in a war, against an enemy that could strike back. As a result, they rejected the view that the initial U.S. response should be a massive one and that enemy cities should be struck early and devastated totally. What they wanted was a capability to respond flexibly and in limited ways, to climb the ladder of escalation gradually, and to withhold strikes from Soviet urban areas. This capability, they hoped, would enable the West to tailor its use of nuclear weapons to its political and military purposes, while giving the Soviets an incentive to withhold strikes against U.S. and Allied cities. This emphasis on flexibility led them to demand options from U.S. war plans and delivery systems that went beyond the single script offered by massive retaliation.

For a host of political and military reasons, they believed that the need for multiple options extended to the point of requiring a capability to strike enemy military targets, to support SACEUR's war plans, and otherwise to carry out U.S. obligations to NATO. As a result, they favored an offensive posture that could provide an impressive counterforce capability. During 1961-1963, they funded an expensive array of programs to build a force posture along these lines, and their nuclear strategy variously came to be called one of "no cities," "counterforce," and "flexible response." There were decided limits, however, on how many funds they were willing to invest for this capability. And they were under no illusions that the nuclear posture they were designing could function as an across-the-board deterrent or a victory-providing instrument for actually defending Western Europe if deterrence failed.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>In endorsing the counterforce/multiple options strategy, Kennedy and McNamara rejected two competitor concepts that were popular at the time. The "Minimalist"

Kennedy and McNamara thus did not view nuclear weapons as the centerpiece of American military strategy, especially for the wars that the United States was most likely to have to fight. Also, it is important to remember that while they were bolstering the U.S. missile force, they simultaneously were paring back the Strategic Air Command's (SAC) bomber force, thereby keeping the U.S. nuclear posture roughly level at about 2000 total launchers. At McNamara's behest, Kennedy canceled the new B-70 bomber, an act that provoked a storm of controversy in Washington, and went on to retire many of the Air Force's older B-47 and B-66 bombers. Between 1961 and 1964, the U.S. bomber force fell from about 1800 to 1000 bombers; two years later, it was down to 700 bombers. Only the new B-52s were to be kept on duty, and McNamara himself was harboring plans for retiring them as well. Evidently by 1963 he had come to conclude that the future U.S. posture should include only ballistic missiles and no bombers.<sup>10</sup> Whether Kennedy would have gone that far is an open question, but there is little doubt that both Kennedy and McNamara were embarked on an effort not to enlarge the strategic forces, but rather to restructure them. Both wanted a better-designed nuclear posture, but they wanted one that would play a smaller role in U.S. and NATO military strategy than before.

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strategy called for only enough forces to destroy Soviet urban areas. The second, the "Full Counterforce" strategy, favored by senior Air Force generals, called for a posture fully capable of destroying the Soviet military target system. The Kennedy-McNamara strategy came closer to the Air Force concept, but shied away from any first-strike implications as well as its endorsement of very large force requirements. At the time, for example, the Air Force was requesting some 1600 Minuteman ICBMs. Kennedy and McNamara pared this number back to 1000, a number that reflected OSD estimates of counterforce targeting requirements based on one usable warhead per estimated enemy silo. See Richard L. Kugler, "The Politics of Restraint, Robert McNamara and the Strategic Nuclear Forces, 1963-1968," Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Fall 1975. See also Kaufmann, 1962.

A less flattering interpretation of Kennedy and McNamara holds that their force posture decisions were driven not by a coherent military strategy, but rather by congressional politics, which presumably set a floor on the administration's procurement of missiles and bombers. While congressional pressures clearly entered the equation (as they do in any administration, by law), this interpretation is wide of the mark. Kennedy and McNamara themselves never embraced a theory of force requirements substantially lower than the posture they authorized, nor did OSD studies in these years. In general, the Kennedy-McNamara years saw a uniquely determined effort to subject force posture decisions to careful planning and analysis, and McNamara's studies played a large role in White House decisions. That judgment is shared by senior military officers of the time. Kennedy's decisions cannot be understood in absence of politics, but neither can they be explained in a strategy vacuum.

<sup>10</sup>See Kugler, "The Politics of Restraint," 1975.

They reacted to Europe-deployed theater and tactical nuclear weapons in a similar vein. These weapons provided NATO a temporary advantage in battlefield capability that would endure until the Soviets followed suit. After that, they would be needed to help deter a Soviet theater nuclear blitzkrieg and to provide initial options short of a strategic exchange. For these reasons, and because the NATO allies had been promised a sizable tactical nuclear stockpile, Kennedy and McNamara decided, with only certain exceptions, to bring to fruition plans inherited from the previous administration to deploy several thousand nuclear warheads to Europe. But to Kennedy and McNamara, these weapons were only a partial answer to NATO's military dilemmas. They were insistent that release authority for these weapons remain under U.S. control, and they tried to tailor deployments to help facilitate a doctrine of flexible employment and gradual escalation.

This skepticism about nuclear weapons of all sorts led Kennedy, McNamara, Bundy, and others to conclude that, as a matter of high priority, the United States and NATO required a substantially better conventional defense posture, one that could play a much larger role in the West's military strategy than before. Stronger conventional forces were needed, they believed, to deter nonnuclear attack, to defend if deterrence failed, and to help control escalation. Most immediately, they wanted broader conventional options that could handle limited contingencies and at least delay the need to escalate in a full-scale war, thus partially reducing the West's undue reliance on nuclear weapons. Ideally, they wanted a posture strong enough in itself to handle any form of conventional aggression without resort to escalation at all. In this event, they believed, nuclear weapons could be relegated to the properly limited role that they were still capable of playing in modern military strategy.

Progress on actually building U.S. conventional forces came slowly in early 1961. Although Kennedy did fund about \$1 billion of enhancement measures in his early decisions, he chose to put off decisions on long-range plans until McNamara was able to study the matter thoroughly. McNamara immediately commissioned a set of internal Pentagon analyses to identify the issues and alternatives. The results of these studies were first used to help shape the FY 1962 defense budget supplementals that the Kennedy administration requested during the following months. They then were employed as the basis for developing a comprehensive program to be implemented in succeeding years. McNamara began outlining this plan in the DoD's FY 1963 budget,



which was released to the Congress in early 1962. He elaborated on it more fully in the subsequent budgets for FY 1964 and FY 1965, issued over the following two years. Since this plan had an important bearing on the goals that the Kennedy administration set for NATO strategy reform and Allied force improvements in Central Europe, it is worth examining in some detail.<sup>11</sup>

When he assumed office, McNamara had found a U.S. conventional posture that not only was insufficiently large, but also was poorly designed and badly lacking in internal balance. For example, the Navy provided inadequate sealift to transport U.S.-based Army units to overseas contingencies, while the Air Force's combat aircraft were not oriented to providing support for Army forces once they got there. Meanwhile, the Army itself was not sized, structured, or equipped for conventional fighting. Having atrophied during the preceding years of nuclear planning, it reflected no sound management philosophy. McNamara's plan, which grew out of studies prepared by his staff, aimed at bringing about sweeping changes to rectify this situation.

At the core of McNamara's plan was a program to increase the Army's size, capability, flexibility, and responsiveness. The active Army of 1961 had provided only the equivalent of 11 combat ready divisions. Moreover Army support units for even these divisions were undermanned and poorly stocked. To remedy this problem, McNamara fastened upon a goal of fielding 16 active divisions, along with three independent brigades and six armored cavalry regiments. All of these units were to be made capable of fighting on short notice and to be sufficiently supported to sustain combat for a lengthy period. To help achieve this goal, McNamara decided to increase the readiness of the Army's three training divisions, build two entirely new divisions, and increase funding for support units and war reserves stockpiles.

McNamara also set about to reshape the Army's internal structure. Based on a study of the many theaters in which the Army might fight, he decided to configure it with several types of divisions that would provide a broad range of capabilities for different kinds of combat. He initially settled on a program to structure the Army with three armored, two mechanized, nine infantry, and two airborne divisions. Later, this plan was altered somewhat to provide even greater diversity. One mechanized division was

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<sup>11</sup>The following material is taken primarily from McNamara's posture statements and public testimony to the Congress during 1961-1964, multiple official sources. See also Alain Enthoven and K. Wayne Smith, *How Much Is Enough? Shaping the Defense Program, 1961-1968*, Harper and Row, New York, 1971.

converted to armored status, an infantry division was transformed into a helicopter-equipped "air assault" division, and a separate air cavalry brigade was created. Also, McNamara approved plans to abandon the nuclear-oriented Pentomic division.<sup>12</sup> In its place was adopted a new, conventional war-oriented structure called the "ROAD" division. This model was to have three large brigades that would command some ten battalions. Along with this step came guidance to broaden Army doctrine to include nonnuclear operations.

McNamara instituted similar changes in the Army's Reserve and National Guard forces. He had inherited a posture of some 37 divisions: 10 Reserve and 27 National Guard. This force appeared imposing on paper. Indeed it was larger than DoD war plans required. But most of these units were undermanned and poorly equipped to the point where they could not be made ready for combat within an acceptable period of time. Senior Army generals largely discounted this force as being incapable of contributing to the nation's immediate security needs. In World War II the Army had found that it could train an entirely new division of recruits in a shorter period than its reserves could be made ready. Little had changed since then. The Reserve and Guard forces tended to reflect domestic political imperatives rather than strategic needs. Since the Pentagon was spending considerable sums on these forces and needed their help, McNamara found this situation intolerable.

McNamara set about to improve things within the limits of the 700,000-man ceiling then authorized. His goal was to trim away expensive and unavailable units, while preparing a smaller and more ready force that would be promptly available in the event of war. He disbanded four reserve divisions but authorized each of the remaining six divisions an increased manning level of 75 percent. He also pared down the National Guard to 21 divisions and approved a higher manning level of 50-60 percent for the survivors. His specific aim was to build Reserve units that could deploy overseas within eight weeks after mobilization and National Guard divisions that would be available after 24-36 weeks.

The tactical air and naval forces also required expansion, but fewer internal changes. McNamara authorized an air buildup from 16 to 21 active wings, along with the equivalent of ten reserve wings. To achieve this buildup, he increased procurement

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<sup>12</sup>For an analysis of the Pentomic division, see A. J. Bacevich, *The Pentomic Era: The U.S. Army Between Korea and Vietnam*, National Defense University Press, Fort Leslie J. McNair, Washington, D.C., 1986.

of new F-105 and F-4 fighter bombers from 180 aircraft per year to 435 annually. Among a variety of related measures, he approved construction of aircraft shelters and other airbase enhancements for units deployed overseas. He also purchased larger munitions stocks that would enable the Air Force to fight sustained conventional war and to support the Army.

The active Marine Corps was maintained at three divisions and plans were set in motion to form a Reserve Marine division. McNamara set the Navy's force level at 836 ships, including 15 attack carriers, nine smaller antisubmarine warfare (ASW) carriers, and a large fleet of surface combatants and attack submarines. In doing so, McNamara faced the challenge of maintaining a large Navy in the face of growing bloc obsolescence problems as many ships of World War II vintage approached retirement. For this reason, he began turning aside Navy requests for nuclear powered carriers and other types of expensive modern warships. His goal was to build a posture that balanced the Navy's needs for both size and modern equipment.

Finally, McNamara launched plans to expand the Defense Department's strategic lift forces for deploying combat units overseas. Here McNamara was guided by two principles. First, a war in Europe or elsewhere very likely would break out suddenly, perhaps after only a brief period of warning. The United States would have to be capable of reacting quickly. Second, what mattered was getting to the battlefield first with the most. A large posture might count for little if it could not arrive early in the fighting. Similarly, overall requirements probably would be lower if the defense was strong from the onset.

Accordingly, McNamara approved a costly program to enhance overseas mobility. He authorized procurement of more C-130, C-135, and C-141 transport aircraft; in the early 1960s, as a result, U.S. airlift capacity more than doubled. He also approved acquisition of new high-capacity cargo ships and other measures to improve U.S. sealift. Finally, he approved the prepositioning of equipment for two U.S. Army combat divisions in Europe. The specific goal of these measures was to provide an improved, time-phased overseas deployment rate. The program for prepositioning was designed to permit deployment to Europe of these reinforcing divisions within a few days: the time needed to transport their manpower by passenger airplanes. The airlift measures were intended to provide one or two additional divisions during the following two or three weeks. The sealift programs aimed at establishing a massive seaborne reinforcement and replenishment capability within about a month.

These management reforms, and the centralization of Defense Department decisionmaking that accompanied them, did not endear McNamara to the military services, which resented civilian intrusion into their business. But even his severest critics were hardpressed to refute the notion that McNamara's plans flowed from a coherent strategic concept. McNamara's concept called for a stable overseas force of five Army divisions and three regiments in Europe, along with four total divisions in the Pacific: two Army divisions in Korea, an Army division in Hawaii, and a Marine division divided between Okinawa and Hawaii. These ground forces, associated tactical air units, and naval forces of the Atlantic and Pacific fleets were to provide highly visible deterrence and an initial capability to react in a crisis. Backing up these forward-deployed forces was to be a central "strategic reserve" in the United States of eight active Army divisions, two Marine divisions, and a large mass of active air, naval, and mobility forces. In a less immediately available status were to be the Army's six reserve divisions and reserve air units. These active and reserve component forces were to provide a large pool that the United States could draw upon to reinforce its units in Europe and Korea, the most likely sites of a major war, or to respond to contingencies elsewhere. The idea here was to use the global flexibility provided by this strategic reserve to help compensate for the lack of adequate overseas-based forces in either theater.

Once this concept had been firmly established as the basis for guiding the Defense Department's planning efforts, McNamara felt that the task of determining the overall size and composition of U.S. forces had been completed. The task ahead was one of ensuring that the posture was kept adequately ready, sustained, and modernized. As he was well aware, however, his plan for enhancing purely U.S. forces was not sufficient to solve all the West's security problems. It merely meant that the United States was now in a position to make its largest possible contribution to what unavoidably had to be a coalition effort involving many other nations in Europe and the Far East.

McNamara publicly claimed that President Kennedy had instructed him to fashion a proper U.S. military strategy independent of any arbitrary budget ceiling and then to design a posture that would support it at lowest cost. In truth, McNamara's strategic concept was responsive to fiscal constraints, albeit less stringent ones than Eisenhower had imposed. For this reason, McNamara's strategic concept did not pretend to offer absolute security. While it provided intelligent guidelines for supporting America's global interests, it was based on a force posture that, despite McNamara's best efforts,

alone was not strong enough to meet all military requirements that might arise. It aspired to buy more insurance and provide a higher level of military confidence than previous plans and forces. But it did not claim to eliminate all potential risks.

In particular, the new posture fell short—in size and lift capability—of fully providing the capacity to support the "2-1/2 war" strategy that McNamara later characterized as his goal. That meant a NATO-Warsaw Pact war in Europe concurrently with a People's Republic of China (PRC) assault in Asia (either in Korea or Southeast Asia) and a small contingency elsewhere. McNamara's posture could have fought a global war of this sort only if time permitted the full mobilization of the Army's 21 National Guard divisions, a step that would have provided fully 46 Army and Marine divisions. But mobilization and deployment of the National Guard would have taken at least 4–6 months. In the dangerously long period in between, McNamara's posture would have provided only some 19 active divisions (Army and Marine) and six less ready Reserve divisions, a total of only 25 divisions.

This force, of course, was not without impressive capabilities of its own. For example, it could have provided eight divisions for a Korea conflict (enough for that theater) and a three division strategic reserve, while also setting aside some 13 divisions for Europe. Although these 13 divisions would have been sufficient for peacetime needs and most limited crises there, they would not have been adequate to contend with a full-scale war. To defend Western Europe in this case, deployment of nearly all 25 divisions would have been necessary, thereby making a Korea commitment impossible. Hence McNamara's readily available posture fell short of being able to fight two large wars at once. In truth, it could have fought only one. With U.S.-PRC relations unsettled at the time, Washington's margin of insurance rested on the hope that sufficient time would elapse between wars in Europe and the Far East to mobilize the National Guard.

The ability of this posture to handle the NATO contingency even in absence of a Far East diversion was itself uncertain. While a buildup of 20–25 U.S. divisions in Western Europe would have appreciably bolstered NATO's defenses, the deployment of these forces, even with McNamara's stronger mobility programs, would have taken two or three months. In the interim, NATO would have been limited to the five U.S. divisions available on M-Day and the two divisions that would arrive in the first week or two. If the Soviets succeeded in launching an attack before the U.S. reinforcement effort was fully underway, NATO's prospects for holding out would not have been bright.

For this reason, McNamara was chary about claiming too much for the Kennedy administration's military buildup with respect to NATO. In his public statements of the early 1960s, he was careful to point out that NATO might not be able to contain a determined Warsaw Pact attack and, if so, it would have to resort to nuclear escalation. Since the United States could not hope to solve this problem by itself, NATO's future prospects therefore rested in the hands of the West Europeans. Somehow, McNamara and Kennedy knew, the Allies had to be persuaded to follow the U.S. example by disengaging from their reliance on nuclear weapons and by embarking upon their own conventional buildup.

### III. WHITHER NATO? THE INFLUENCE OF THE BERLIN CRISIS

Although the Kennedy administration was preoccupied in its early months with American defense policy, it was not silent on the larger matter of NATO's military strategy. It began presenting its views, albeit in a restrained tone, during the NATO Ministerial meetings that were held in the spring and fall of 1961, and in private meetings with West European political leaders. Also, it issued a number of public statements on this topic to the U.S. Congress and the American public, all of which were picked up by the European press, disseminated widely across the continent, and studied carefully by keenly interested Allied governments.

On the whole, while impressed by the new administration's vitality, most West European governments reacted warily to Kennedy's interest in refashioning U.S. and NATO military strategy.<sup>1</sup> Having been wrenched around by the Eisenhower administration's endorsement of a nuclear strategy only a few years before, they were reluctant to undergo yet another U.S.-inspired change in NATO's doctrine. This view was especially prevalent in West Germany, where the Adenauer government had been compelled to pay a heavy domestic price out of loyalty to Eisenhower and did not want a second beating to please Kennedy. The British were more philosophical, but the attitude in Paris, where Charles de Gaulle saw American leadership of NATO as a threat to France's stature, was even less forthcoming.

Although their views were not unanimous, most Allied governments by now had come to believe firmly that deterrence was the predominant goal of Alliance strategy, rather than actually preparing for war. They further believed that the Alliance could best safeguard deterrence by unambiguously expressing its firm resolve to use strategic nuclear weapons at the onset of any Soviet attack. They also doubted that NATO could afford to build an effective conventional defense in the face of the Warsaw Pact's vaunted superiority in these forces. Many went beyond this to conclude that a conventional buildup actually would weaken deterrence by leading the Soviets to believe

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<sup>1</sup>For an analysis of West European reactions, see David N. Schwartz, *NATO's Nuclear Dilemmas*, The Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., 1983. Also see Jane E. Stromseth, *The Origins of Flexible Response, NATO's Debate over Strategy in the 1960s*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1988.

that NATO in fact was not prepared to use nuclear weapons to resist an invasion. All this hardly left them predisposed to Kennedy's arguments for flexibility and stronger conventional forces.

These judgments were influenced by more fundamental concerns. On budgetary grounds, most Allies were averse to the high costs of a major conventional buildup, especially in light of the dubious returns they believed it would yield. They had prospered under the Eisenhower administration's nuclear umbrella, which partially excused them from the onerous military burdens that the ambitious 1952 Lisbon Goals had placed on them, and were in no mood to change now. Their highest priority was to continue their economic recovery, and they did not welcome the idea of diverting more resources into defense preparedness. Most also still bore the psychological scars of World War II in ways that further tempered their willingness to play the role in the NATO alliance that the Kennedy administration envisioned for them. This was especially true in the FRG, where rearmament was compelling West Germany to assume the burdens of a frontline state long before its citizens were eager for this role. It also was true in France, which still was struggling to recapture its self-confidence after the humiliations of World War II and its internal instability of the 1950s. The British were more forthcoming, but their struggling economy placed sharp constraints on the assets that even they could afford to divert to military strength. None of this meant that the West European Allies were oblivious of their Alliance responsibilities or indifferent to the need for a coherent NATO military strategy. Nonetheless, most preferred to let the United States handle the Soviet military threat, thereby placing the defense burden primarily on American shoulders while allowing themselves to attend to their economic agenda.

The Allies' negative attitude toward higher defense spending can be understood only in the context of the economic circumstances that prevailed in Western Europe at the time. The Common Market had been formed in the late 1950s, and West Europeans stood poised on the brink of the economic expansion that was to enlarge on wealth over the following two decades. But in 1961, they still were poor in relation to their American cousins. West Germany's per capita income was only 40 percent that of the United States, and the other European nations were no better off. The Europeans still had little discretionary income to invest in new initiatives, and their overwhelming priority was to put it into industrial expansion rather than military programs. The consensus was that



Western Europe simply could not afford the large defense budgets that the Americans wanted for the Alliance.

Dependence on U.S. military power, however, did not translate into a ready willingness to do Washington's bidding on the delicate matter of NATO's defense strategy. The Allies' enthusiasm for being completely dependent on American pledges in particular was tempered by growing concern about whether they could safely afford to rely on U.S. nuclear guarantees now that the Soviet Union was acquiring long-range nuclear forces of its own. This left them acutely sensitive to any signs of reappraisal from the United States, regardless of how highly veiled they might be. The specific agenda that the Allies were pursuing differed from one country to the next. The French were coming to see salvation in building their own national nuclear deterrent, one whose independent use against the Soviet Union would automatically draw the United States into the fray. The British wanted to continue building their own fledgling nuclear posture, while tightening nuclear links between Washington and London. The West Germans and the other Allies were not seeking national nuclear independence, but they were coming to favor stronger Alliance-wide nuclear integration. What united all the Allies was a common belief that the main item on NATO's agenda was not a conventional buildup but rather a reaffirmation of extended nuclear deterrence and concrete steps to strengthen the U.S. nuclear guarantee.

In light of these views, which differed so sharply from Washington's, the Kennedy administration's dialogue with the West Europeans got off to a rocky start. Kennedy's early rejection of massive retaliation and his calls for better conventional forces did not go down well in Europe, especially in capitals that also did not welcome the fiscal implications. Partly for this reason, the Kennedy administration initially adopted an approach that stopped short of saying that NATO's basic strategy should be altered. It maintained instead that the Alliance merely needed to execute the force goals already on the books. At the time, NATO's official goals, although derived from MC 14/2, called for 30 active divisions in Central Europe and, as a distinctly secondary priority, another 20-30 reserve divisions. Achieving these goals alone, McNamara and other U.S. officials said, would give NATO sufficiently broad military options, including a more sustainable conventional defense.

This approach, aided by the tense atmosphere in Europe, produced positive results during the Kennedy administration's first year in office when Allied defense spending

rose by an average of 22 percent. The FRG primarily was responsible for this upward trend: Bonn's spending rose by fully 50 percent as it funded its long-planned rearmament program that by now was gathering momentum. But other Allies contributed as well: British spending increased by 14 percent, Italian and Danish budgets by about 30 percent, and French spending by 8 percent. This trend soon began to make itself felt as Allied increases interacted with the U.S. buildup to bolster NATO's posture. As a result, McNamara was able to point out that SACEUR soon would be able to command the equivalent of more than 20 divisions within a few days of mobilization, a useful increase over the 17 divisions of only two years before. Nonetheless, this still fell well short of NATO's official force goals for even a nuclear strategy, much less a full-fledged conventional defense.<sup>2</sup>

The Kennedy administration might well have continued pursuing this restrained course, but the Berlin crisis intervened at this point to send shivers down Washington's spine and galvanize it into greater action.<sup>3</sup> In January 1961, Soviet Premier Khrushchev had openly threatened to sign a peace treaty with East Germany, an act that he claimed would end the West's legal rights in Berlin, including occupation rights, access rights, and four-power administration of the divided city. In early June, Kennedy met with Khrushchev in Vienna, where the Soviet Premier bluntly made clear his demand for a Berlin settlement inimical to NATO's interests. In the following weeks, Khrushchev stepped up the pressure by complaining about the flow of refugees to West Berlin, forecasting new travel restrictions along the air and ground corridors from the west, and increasing Soviet military spending. Then during the night of August 13, East German troops installed roadblocks and barricades on streets linking the two parts of the city and began building the infamous wall to seal off West Berlin from the communist side. A crisis that potentially could lead to war seemed in the offing, one that focused a bright spotlight on NATO's weak conventional defenses.

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<sup>2</sup>See McNamara's public testimony in 1961 and 1962. Also, see Kaufmann, *The McNamara Strategy*, and Enthoven and Smith, *How Much Is Enough?*

<sup>3</sup>For first-hand accounts of U.S. and NATO planning during the Berlin crisis, see Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1965; McGeorge Bundy, *Danger and Survival: Choices About the Bomb in the First Fifty Years*, Random House, New York, 1988; and Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years at the State Department*, W. W. Norton and Company, New York, 1969.

Although the Soviets focused their complaints on West Berlin per se, in past years they often had turned the screws on that city as part of a much larger agenda. One Soviet aim seemed to be to gain Western recognition of the East German state, a step that the FRG as well as other NATO nations were not prepared to take. Beyond this, many Western analysts believed that Khrushchev was using the West's exposed position in Berlin to compel a showdown that would expose American reluctance to defend Western Europe's interests, intimidate West Germany, and weaken NATO.

Kennedy and other Western leaders were resolved to stand firm on Berlin, but they wanted to act in ways that would contain the risk that nuclear war would break out. As a result, in the spring of 1961 Kennedy ordered contingency plans for managing the crisis and especially for responding intelligently to an overt Soviet military move to deny western access to the divided city. His order resulted in an internal study by Dean Acheson on Berlin options as well as creation of a U.S. interagency task force on Berlin. Following this, a Washington Ambassadorial Group was formed, consisting of representatives from the United States, Britain, France, and West Germany. Also, SHAPE Headquarters, under General Norstad, intensified its analyses of Berlin alternatives. The summer and fall were to see intense activity by these groups aimed at deciding how NATO could respond if a showdown over Berlin occurred.

Together, these reviews produced a four-phased sequence of increasingly strong responses by NATO. The first three phases began with diplomatic embargoes and economic sanctions and escalated through limited conventional military measures, including maritime harassment, NATO mobilization, and armed probes down the autobahn to West Berlin. The fourth phase involved further escalation, including the use of nuclear weapons. The development of these options put NATO in a better position for responding to whatever Soviet moves might lie ahead, but they also illustrated graphically how ill-prepared NATO was to employ conventional forces in the crisis. Part of the problem was that SHAPE's original plans had been poorly developed and resorted far too early to nuclear weapons. But even with better plans, NATO's inadequate conventional forces severely inhibited the Alliance's ability to respond in military ways that made sense.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>See Paul Nitze, *From Hiroshima to Glasnost: At the Center of Decision—A Memoir*, Gove Weidenfeld, New York, 1989, Ch. 12, pp. 195–213. Nitze, the Pentagon's Assistant Secretary for International Security Affairs, provides a detailed account of how these options were developed.

To be sure, NATO had enough forces to engage in limited military moves that were designed simply to send a political signal. For example, if West Berlin were sealed off, NATO was capable of sending a powerful armored force up the autobahn to Berlin, one that the East German Army alone could not contain. But if the Soviet Army chose to offer resistance, NATO's forces were too weak to liberate West Berlin or otherwise engage in militarily decisive operations. In this event, Norstad reported, a NATO advance would probably reach only to Magdeburg, a town on the Elbe River about 25 miles into East Germany. Having contained NATO's advance, the Soviets would then be in a strong position to launch a theaterwide counterattack that might overpower NATO's defenses and result in the complete loss of West Germany. SHAPE's only counter was an immediate, large-scale use of nuclear weapons, including nuclear bombardment of the Soviet Union. Lacking a strong conventional posture, NATO thus found itself in a poor position for climbing the nonnuclear rungs of the escalation ladder against a Soviet adversary that held the trump card of military supremacy in Europe.

Faced with these daunting military constraints, Kennedy and other Western leaders behaved with a mixture of firmness and caution as the crisis unfolded. Among his moves, Kennedy opened negotiations with the Soviets to determine if the Berlin problem could be resolved on terms that respected the West's interests. He also acted unilaterally by sending a contingent of U.S. troops to Berlin to exercise the West's rights and to warn the Soviets not to institute another blockade. In a similar vein, he dispatched Vice President Johnson to West Berlin to reassure the people of that city and appointed retired General Lucius Clay, a leading figure in the 1948-1949 Berlin airlift, as his personal representative there.

While Kennedy turned aside the idea of declaring a national emergency, he did approve measures to bolster American forces in Europe as well as U.S.-based units that could be quickly deployed there. This partial buildup was deemed necessary not only to shore up the Alliance's defenses but also because it was a good means to signal Washington's resolve. As a result, the United States increased its military presence by 1500 soldiers in Berlin and by 40,000 men in Europe overall. Eleven tactical fighter squadrons were despatched there and total American ground strength was enlarged to the equivalent of six divisions. In the United States, a partial mobilization was ordered and reserve formations were called up. Within a few weeks 45 combat air squadrons and two National Guard divisions were activated; two more Guard divisions were placed in a high

state of readiness for a possible callup. Overall, the U.S. defense establishment increased by about 300,000 soldiers.

The Berlin crisis began to ease during the winter of 1962 as the Soviets, evidently content with the Berlin Wall and reluctant to provoke NATO further, turned down the heat. But even though it ended peacefully, the crisis had driven home to the White House, in ways that genuinely unsettled American leaders, the message that the United States and NATO needed to bolster their conventional defenses. The Allies did not react in a similar vein. Indeed, their sense of urgency began to fade as the Berlin crisis receded, and old arguments came back to the fore. In Washington, Kennedy administration officials came to the conclusion that if a sustained NATO buildup was to be achieved, the United States would have to bite the bullet by engaging the Allies in a formal debate over NATO military strategy itself. This debate, they knew, would have to directly confront the sensitive issue of how far the Alliance could afford to go in continuing to place reliance on nuclear weapons and whether it should transfer greater responsibility to NATO's conventional forces.

#### IV. THE DEBATE ERUPTS

The Berlin crisis helped jar the Kennedy administration into pursuing an activist course of strategy reform in Europe that was to plunge the Alliance into a stressful, multiyear debate and changed NATO in major ways. This debate revolved around the intricacies of modern strategy, but it can be understood only in the context of the larger NATO political setting of the early 1960s. The previous decade had seen unprecedented harmony in transatlantic relations, and the Kennedy administration hoped to revitalize the Alliance to strengthen NATO's bonds strategically, politically, and economically; but events were pulling in the opposite direction in ways that made a fruitful dialogue on military strategy all the more difficult.

One problem was that the United States clearly intended to lead the western alliance on a diplomatic path aimed at defusing the confrontation with the Soviets over Central Europe. Although this course was dictated by the growing nuclear arsenals on both sides, it rankled West Germany's nerves. The Adenauer government still refused to recognize the East German regime and sought reunification as the price for Bonn's acceptance of postwar borders. Adenauer feared that Kennedy was willing to sell West Germany out on this score, as part of a policy of East-West accommodation. The Berlin crisis had reinforced these fears to the point where signs of American flexibility on military strategy was seen as further evidence of American willingness to accept the political status quo in Europe. France meanwhile was distrustful of Kennedy for entirely different reasons. De Gaulle saw Kennedy's European policy as an effort to perpetuate American control over the continent, thereby denying France its rightful grandeur. Determined to wrench Europe away from American control and place it under French direction, de Gaulle was opposed to the idea of cooperating with Kennedy's strategy reforms on purely political grounds, regardless of their military content.

Transatlantic relations thus were already frayed on the eve of NATO's strategy debate. Additionally, relations among the West European partners also were showing signs of eroding. Both West Germany and France were skeptical of American political intentions, but not in ways that drove them into each other's arms. Adenauer wanted to continue in a confrontationist course with the Soviet Union, but de Gaulle, no enthusiast over German unification, envisioned harmonious relations with the Soviets on terms that

left Moscow's empire in Eastern Europe unchallenged. Bonn and Paris also entertained different visions for the six-nation European Economic Community (EEC). The West German government sought an integrated community, one linked to the United States in a close economic partnership. De Gaulle, by contrast, wanted a loosely knit economic confederation that left France's sovereignty unchecked, kept the United States at arm's length, and even excluded Britain, America's close ally. This conflict between France and West Germany threatened to stall West European integration, possibly to the point of rehashing old animosities.

The British, meanwhile, found themselves caught between the United States and their continental Allies. Unwilling to part with the United States or commit themselves to West European integration, Britain had joined with six other European nations to form the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). Europe consequently found itself at sixes and sevens, with the Common Market and the EFTA dividing the continent into two separate trading blocs. On the outside stood the United States. Fearing the emergence of adversarial transatlantic economic relations, the United States sought to knock down trade barriers through the Kennedy Round of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) negotiations. This effort was to pay off some years later, but in 1961, Washington was beginning to doubt the intentions of its West European partners, especially in the sensitive areas of agricultural policy and balance-of-payments dynamics. The West Europeans, for their part, saw in American policy a self-centered effort to perpetuate the advantageous features of the Bretton Woods system, which helped insulate the United States from international economic competition.

To complicate matters further, events on NATO's southern flank further strained NATO's cohesion. The conflict between Turkey and Greece over Cyprus had flamed anew in 1960, in ways that left the United States and other alliance members arrayed against Turkey's designs on Cyprus. Taken together, these trends—growing transatlantic frictions, the slowing of West European integration, and southern flank strains—created a troubled atmosphere. The setting was hardly ideal for a debate over military strategy that, even in the best of circumstances, would have been contentious.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For an overview of U.S.-West European strategic and economic relations in the early 1960s, see Wolfram E. Hanreider, *Germany, America, Europe: Forty Years of German Foreign Policy*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1989; Gary Clyde Hufbauer, *Europe 1992: An American Perspective*, Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., 1990; Lawrence S. Kaplan, *NATO and the United States: The Enduring Alliance*, Twayne, Boston, 1988.

In this setting, McNamara began moving in the direction of strategy reform in the fall of 1961 NATO ministerial meeting, when he began outlining the Kennedy administration's views in a preliminary fashion. This accomplished, he then took a giant second step by addressing the subject more completely in the next ministerial session, held in Athens in the spring of 1962.

In the landmark address he delivered there, his intentions were not wholly focused on administering a strategic shock to the Allies; indeed, one of his goals was to reassure them about the U.S. commitment to Western Europe's defense. But he also had two other goals in mind that were unavoidably controversial. First, he wanted the Allies to appreciate the need for greater flexibility in NATO's military strategy, especially the need to deemphasize massive retaliation and nuclear escalation as the foundation of deterrence. Second, he wanted to discourage the West Europeans from deploying their own nuclear missile forces and to prod them into making a commitment to stronger conventional defenses. He was particularly worried about France's nuclear program, which he did not want to become a model for other nations. These goals motivated him to attempt a highly ambitious task for a single speech: the presentation of a comprehensive statement on the full extent to which the United States believed that NATO military strategy should be changed. This required a revealing assessment of how the changing roles of nuclear and conventional forces were linked together, one that lent itself to both scrutiny and incredulity.<sup>2</sup>

McNamara's Athens Speech unveiled a vision that, to the audience of Allied ministers, was breathtaking in its scope and the departures it envisioned. Several weeks later McNamara presented an abbreviated version of this speech in a commencement address to the University of Michigan graduating class at Ann Arbor. In contrast to the Athens Speech, which was delivered in NATO's private councils, the Ann Arbor was delivered in a public forum. Although lacking the classified details of the Athens Speech, it conveyed the same provocative policy conclusions. It attracted considerable media attention in the United States, and its contents quickly became public across Western Europe. Efforts by other U.S. officials to articulate McNamara's themes in different forums following the Ann Arbor Speech attracted similar attention. Later that summer, Washington announced that the present SACEUR, General Norstad, would be

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<sup>2</sup>William Kaufmann, *The McNamara Strategy*, provides an analysis of the events surrounding the Athens Speech. See also Stromseth, *The Origins of Flexible Response*.



replaced by Army General Lyman Lemnitzer and that General Maxwell Taylor, a noted proponent of flexible response, would become Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Together, these developments had the effect of transforming an internal NATO matter into a full-blown public debate, one that had the potential of causing serious transatlantic frictions at a time when Alliance nerves were already wearing thin.

At Athens and Ann Arbor, as well as elsewhere over the next several months, McNamara stressed three central themes that reflected the Kennedy administration's views about NATO's military strategy. First, he made clear that the U.S. nuclear guarantee to Western Europe remained intact and that deterrence was Washington's foremost goal. Second, he went on to say, deterrence was not so certain that the West could completely dismiss the prospect of nuclear war. Accordingly, he maintained, NATO defense plans needed to address exactly how such a war might be fought. He proposed that the West should approach a nuclear war in much the same manner that it traditionally waged a conventional war: It should conduct nuclear operations with a view toward attaining specific wartime goals, which might be limited in nature.

This led him to conclude that NATO should not plan an automatic, massive first strike against the Soviet Union's cities and urban-industrial areas. Instead, he said, NATO should design its strategic forces to absorb an enemy first strike and then to retaliate in a flexible, measured way. Specifically, NATO should plan to attack the enemy's military forces while avoiding cities, if possible. In this way, it might be possible to control escalation and avert massive damage to both sides. What applied to strategic nuclear war, he said, was also relevant to tactical nuclear operations. Rather than launch a theater-wide nuclear blitzkrieg at the onset, he asserted, NATO should plan to undertake a controlled response. It should try to exercise restraint in the scope and nature of its targeting, and it should climb the escalation ladder as slowly and carefully as possible, all the while trying to terminate the fighting.

Within this revised framework for nuclear operations, McNamara addressed his third theme: NATO's need for better conventional defenses. He maintained that in the interests of achieving deterrence and permitting a controlled response, NATO should strive to build much stronger forces. NATO's future posture should do more than merely provide a brief "pause" before escalating. It should aspire instead to conduct a full-fledged forward defense against a major attack, aiming to contain it as long as possible and preferably to defeat it entirely. In essence, he called for a posture that, without

resorting to nuclear weapons at all, ideally could conduct an effective defense along traditional lines.

## **FEASIBILITY OF CONVENTIONAL DEFENSE**

McNamara maintained that a viable NATO conventional defense was a feasible proposition.<sup>3</sup> Part of his argument was that the West's economic recovery had come far enough to the point where the West Europeans now had the financial, industrial, and manpower resources for such an endeavor. Indeed, the NATO nations were now economically superior to the Warsaw Pact by a wide margin, and the difference was growing daily. In purely material terms, there was no reason why the West, by intelligently pooling its resources, could not afford to compete with the Soviet bloc. The issue was a matter of willpower, not assets. Equally important, he maintained, the Soviet Union was not the invincible military leviathan of common lore. This was a theme that he was increasingly to develop, with growing analytical power, as the 1960s unfolded. But it was present in his arguments, if only in sketchy form, from the early 1960s onward. His arguments merit a detailed recounting here, for they played a key role in his efforts to persuade the Allies to follow his lead.

During the 1950s, the West had unquestioningly accepted the assumption that the Soviet Union enjoyed overwhelming conventional military preponderance over NATO. By 1960, this belief had acquired the status of a virtual myth: something so held to be true that it was beyond inquiry. McNamara was not a man who believed in myths, especially when they stood in the way of sound policy. Moreover, Khrushchev himself had substantially pared back Soviet conventional forces during the late 1950s. These actions suggested that Soviet military strength was not what it had been in Stalin's heyday and that the present Soviet government was not completely oblivious to competing priorities and the need to institute economies.

McNamara sensed this even before he had the data to prove it. In contrast to Western intelligence analysts, who tended to focus solely on the Soviet Union, McNamara and his OSD aides had the advantage of managing the Pentagon's budget and force posture. This left them sensitive to the tough budgetary choices that had to be

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<sup>3</sup>The following material on McNamara's analysis of the NATO-Warsaw Pact military balance is taken primarily from his annual posture statements and congressional testimony during these years. See also Enthoven and Smith's book, *How Much is Enough?* for a detailed appraisal of McNamara's views and those of the OSD staffs.

made in the Pentagon, aware that resources were never unlimited, and attuned to the realities of having to make unpleasant tradeoffs. What applied in the Pentagon, they believed, inevitably must apply, to some degree, to the Kremlin as well. The Soviets clearly had decided to emphasize large size in structuring their Army's combat forces. But in the process, they very likely had made compromises in such important areas as readiness, sustainability, and modernization, a practice that the U.S. military services had followed before McNamara arrived. Precisely where the Soviets had made their tradeoffs, at the time, was uncertain. But the likelihood of internal compromises meant that the reality of Soviet military strength might well fall far short of appearances.

These suspicions led McNamara to apply the same analytical techniques to the West's intelligence estimates that he was employing to shape the U.S. defense program. Beginning in 1961, he had instructed two of his OSD staffs—Systems Analysis and International Security Affairs—to work with the Central Intelligence Agency in analyzing the Soviet defense establishment with the goal of separating fact from fiction. This effort quickly began to shed startling new insights that tended to confirm McNamara's basic instincts. As it grew in stature during the following years, it raised increasingly persuasive doubts (in McNamara's mind at least) about Soviet invincibility, doubts that made NATO's defense tasks seem more manageable.

Even on the surface of things, the notion of Soviet/Warsaw Pact superiority did not stand up well. Aggregate economic data suggested that the Soviet Union, being a less prosperous and more agricultural nation than the West, should have more difficulty in supporting a large military establishment. When the data on manpower levels were added up, not surprisingly it turned out that NATO actually had more men under arms than the Warsaw Pact: 6.0 million vs. 4.5 million. Moreover, a so-called "PEMA Paradox" (PEMA means "Procurement, Equipment and Missiles for the Army") became evident when Soviet defense spending was examined in detail. While its exact defense spending levels were uncertain, the Soviet Union was not credited with a defense budget vastly larger than the United States. Consequently, the USSR seemed unlikely to be able to afford all the equipment required to fully outfit the 175 divisions that the West estimated to be in its Army. This would have required budgetary expenditures roughly four times what the United States spent on its Army and equal to U.S. expenditures for all its forces, an improbable level. This insight, in itself, did not prove that the West's threat estimates were inflated, but it did raise intriguing questions.

As McNamara's analysis probed more deeply, a second "PEOPLE Paradox" became evident. Although the Soviets were credited with 175 fully armed, combat ready divisions, their entire Army apparently totaled only about two million active duty soldiers, or enough to man only about 40 divisions at full strength comparable to U.S. standards. This did not mean that the Soviet Army was itself limited to a posture of 40 divisions, since the two armies had vastly different support philosophies that enabled the Soviets to field more divisions than the U.S. Army for a given level of manpower. The U.S. Army was known to provide its divisions with large support forces to provide sustainability in overseas fighting, whereas the Soviets, who were able to draw directly on their homeland assets and placed less emphasis on sustainability, evidently relied on a leaner support structure. Nonetheless, this difference in support systems did not seem to fully explain the PEOPLE Paradox: Two million troops were barely adequate to man 175 divisions alone, with no allowance for any divisional support or a training base and other unavoidable overhead. Somewhere, something was wrong with the West's estimates. The only conceivable answer was that the Soviet divisions relied heavily on reserve troops to fill out their divisions and support structures. This, however, meant that large portions of the Soviet Army were less ready than the West originally had thought.

Further detailed analysis showed that while the Soviet Army did maintain a large number of fully active divisions, at least half of their divisions were kept in "cadre" status. In essence, they had only 10-50 percent of their required manpower and would need to draw on mobilized reserves to reach full strength. Further degrading their readiness was the fact that many of these units also did not have a full complement of equipment and therefore would need to draw on reserve stocks or the civilian economy. These constraints on their readiness did not mean that these divisions would not be available to fight in a war against NATO. Over a period of weeks and months, they could be brought to active status, trained, and deployed forward. But the delay would provide the United States time to reinforce NATO by deploying its active forces and even to mobilize its own National Guard and Reserve units. Thus NATO would be able to build up larger forces than the 25 divisions that were immediately available in Central Europe.

The realization that the wartime military balance in Central Europe would be a function of time-phased buildup rates on both sides triggered an intensive OSD analysis of exactly how many Warsaw Pact forces would deploy for battle and on what schedule.

McNamara's staff concluded that the Soviets would have immediately available only their roughly 25 divisions based in East Germany, Poland, and perhaps Hungary. These Soviet forces possibly could be joined by another 35 divisions from the German Democratic Republic (GDR), Poland, and Czechoslovakia. Even assuming these divisions would be fully loyal to the Soviet cause (about which important questions remained), they would provide the Soviets a total of only 57 divisions. This was a large force, McNamara's staff concluded, but hardly a juggernaut. These forces, the OSD analysts acknowledged, later could be reinforced with 30-60 additional divisions drawn from the USSR, especially from the nearby Baltic, Byelorussian, and Carpathian military districts. But a Warsaw Pact attack of around 90-100 divisions seemed a likely upper limit given terrain impediments, logistic constraints, competing requirements on the flanks, and the Soviets' need to withhold strategic reserves. This itself would be an imposing force, one large enough to wage an ambitious offensive campaign to completion against an unprepared defense. But it was not so large that it could not be contained by a well-established NATO defense that took advantage of favorable terrain and prepared defense positions.

Given relative buildup rates on both sides, the NATO-Warsaw Pact ground balance in divisions seemed likely to be only about 2-3:1 in the Warsaw Pact's favor at D-Day, far less than earlier estimates, which had suggested a hopelessly large 7:1 disadvantage. Moreover, more detailed analysis of the exact force composition on both sides suggested that the balance might even be closer. In particular, the OSD staffs came to realize that Soviet and East European divisions individually were not as large as most comparable NATO divisions. For example, U.S. and West German divisions fielded about 16,000 troops while Warsaw Pact divisions typically had only 9,000-11,000 men. The Warsaw Pact divisions normally were equipped with a comparably large number of tanks and artillery pieces, but they had fewer infantry, antitank guns, mortars, air defense, and other weapons. Also, their divisional and nondivisional support structures (combat support and combat service support units) fell far short of NATO standards. As a result, they lacked comparable assets in command and control, intelligence and communications, maintenance, engineers, transport, logistics, and other important areas that contributed heavily to combat power.

These differences led OSD analysts to conclude that U.S. Army divisions individually were substantially stronger than their Soviet counterparts. Initial estimates

suggested a U.S. advantage of 1.2-1.7:1. With the help of static firepower scores that were developed to gauge relative strengths, the estimate eventually rose to at least 2:1 and perhaps as high as 3:1. Not all West European divisions enjoyed a comparable advantage, but since West German units were similar to U.S. divisions, they too seemed to be substantially stronger than Soviet units. None of these comforting statistics necessarily meant that U.S. and NATO divisions were themselves properly structured. Indeed, many of their supports assets seemed likely to become a factor only over a sustained period and might not be much help in a short blitzkrieg war that the Soviets probably would try to wage. But these data did puncture further holes in the myth of Soviet invincibility.

Similar insights arose as a result of OSD analyses of the tactical air balance. The Soviets originally were credited with nearly a 3:1 advantage in combat aircraft. But when U.S. reinforcements and basing constraints on Soviet aircraft were taken into account, the numerical balance seemed about equal. Beyond this, NATO's tactical air forces enjoyed important qualitative advantages in aircraft, pilots, munitions, and command and control. This particularly was the case in the important area of ground attack capability. The Soviet air force was primarily oriented to air defense operations and seemed capable of giving a good account for itself in this mission. But its aircraft of the time—MIG 15s, 17s, and 21s—were far inferior to such NATO aircraft as the F-4 and F-105 in range and payload capacity for bombing missions. The OSD analysis optimistically concluded that NATO enjoyed fully a 4:1 lead in the ground attack mission. While the U.S. Air Force disagreed, it came to acknowledge a 2:1 lead for NATO. Even this edge promised to help NATO offset any deficiency in ground combat forces.

These insights led McNamara to infer that a viable NATO conventional defense was a feasible goal. He believed the air and naval situations were well under control. The primary problem lay in the ground balance, where NATO's forces fell below desired levels. But even here NATO's task seemed far from hopeless. An important factor was that NATO did not necessarily have to match the Warsaw Pact's ground forces in divisions, tanks, firepower, and manpower. To some degree, NATO, being on the defensive, could fight outnumbered. What mattered most was whether NATO's forces were large enough to meet the requirements of their defensive strategy. NATO's posture in Europe fell well short of these requirements. But once reinforced from the United States, it promised to come considerably closer.

Even with this analysis, McNamara stopped short of claiming that NATO's forces were fully adequate. This especially was the case in 1962-1963, when his analyses had not yet been fully developed. In later years, he was to grow even more optimistic about NATO's prospects. But in 1962-1963, he readily acknowledged risks, uncertainties, and deficiencies in many areas. However, he asserted even then, NATO's shortcomings could be rectified through a moderate expansion of Allied ground forces and a set of improvement measures to remedy existing problems in weapon inventories, readiness levels, and sustaining stocks. These were requirements that NATO could well afford to meet. The challenge ahead, he concluded, was to keep NATO's nuclear problems in perspective and to address the task of pursuing a conventional buildup, one that could be achieved at affordable levels.

### ALLIED REACTIONS

The Athens Speech itself did not immediately provoke a strong reaction from the Allies, who had been sensitized to the need for flexibility by the Berlin crisis and by McNamara's initial forays at earlier meetings. Some new general guidelines were adopted regarding the circumstances in which NATO might be compelled to resort to nuclear weapons and the political consultative mechanisms that would be employed then. The Athens meeting also produced a U.S. reaffirmation of its nuclear commitment to NATO as well as a similar guarantee by the United Kingdom and a general pledge by the West European Allies to examine ways to strengthen their conventional forces. For the most part, the Allies reacted unenthusiastically to McNamara's suggestion that a new strategy should be adopted. But neither did they formally rebuff McNamara. Apart from France, whose reaction predictably was negative, they adopted the noncommittal stance that McNamara's ideas should be taken under consideration and that the Alliance should proceed in a measured fashion to review its defense options for the future. With this, the meeting adjourned and the Allied ministers returned home to mull over McNamara's words.<sup>4</sup>

As American public pressure for strategy reform built during the weeks after Athens, however, a more vocal Allied political response began to emerge. The West European governments by now had come to realize that McNamara, who had not fully

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<sup>4</sup>See Schwartz, *NATO's Nuclear Dilemmas*; and Stromseth, *The Origins of Flexible Response*, for further analysis of Allied responses.

consulted them in advance of the Athens Speech, was not speaking alone. The drumbeat of official signals coming from Washington was an unambiguous indicator that the entire United States government was prepared to exert its weighty influence to move NATO in the directions that McNamara was urging. In essence, Washington was seriously proposing to yank the rug out from under the very nuclear strategy that it originally had written and that NATO had diligently been working on for several years. To the Allies, the unwelcome prospect of a future filled with change, uncertainty, and instability lay ahead. This was something that they scarcely would have welcomed under the best of circumstances but might have been willing to tolerate had they been sympathetic with Washington's goals. In this case, however, their reaction was doubly negative because they felt an aversion, on substantive and economic grounds, to the new military strategy that the United States was attempting to foist upon them.<sup>5</sup>

Especially since McNamara had presented his ideas in a candid and detailed way, many European security experts privately acknowledged that he had raised important issues that needed to be addressed. Some also expressed agreement with his conclusions or at least sympathy with his reasoning. But official reactions took an entirely different, negative form. The French reacted in a particularly hostile way that was hardly unexpected given de Gaulle's skepticism about American intentions and his firm commitment to a nuclear strategy. The British responded in a more neutral fashion. The Macmillan government took umbrage at Washington's apparent criticism of the British nuclear deterrent (McNamara later denied that he had the British in mind in his attacks on national nuclear forces). But it did not oppose Washington's quest for a more flexible defense strategy. Where it parted from McNamara was in its assessment of NATO's conventional improvement priorities. It questioned whether the military balance was as close as McNamara claimed and whether NATO needed, or could attain, staying power lasting more than a brief period. In contrast to McNamara's wish for a three-month long defense posture, the Macmillan government favored a posture that could defend only a few days before going nuclear.

The German response fell midway between the French and British reactions but was decidedly unenthusiastic. The Adenauer government had shown an aversion to the prospect of nuclear escalation during the Berlin crisis the previous year, and Defense Minister Strauss, while an open advocate of nuclear deterrence, had publicly

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid.



acknowledged the need for flexibility in NATO's strategy. Within the West German defense establishment itself, the Air Force strongly favored a nuclear strategy, but many Army officers endorsed a conventional buildup that would strengthen the Bundeswehr while reducing its reliance on nuclear weapons. The West German government leaned heavily toward preserving MC 14/2, but its mind was not entirely closed on the subject.

What mattered most to Bonn was the American nuclear guarantee, NATO's commitment to forward defense of German territory, and the FRG's close relationship with the United States. It was precisely in these areas, however, that the new strategy left the Adenauer government more than a little uneasy. The United States had placed Adenauer in a difficult domestic position by announcing a change in strategy only a few years after he had led a bitter internal battle, at Washington's behest, to nuclearize the German military. Washington's abrupt turnaround had the effect of endorsing the platform that the opposition SPD Party had adopted, while foisting on West Germany a strategy that seemed to make the U.S. nuclear guarantee ambiguous. As a result, Adenauer's political leadership, already weakening, was further eroded. Also, Washington's stance complicated Adenauer's efforts to maintain good relations with de Gaulle. Adenauer now found himself being torn between Washington and Paris, and his reluctance to offend de Gaulle exerted a constraint on how far he was willing to go toward strategy reform. All these considerations hardly left Adenauer and his advisers grateful about McNamara's demarche.

Although specific Allied reactions thus varied from one capital to the next, some themes however were common to all. In general, many found the very fundamentals of McNamara's thinking to be disturbing. In particular, they were alarmed about McNamara's treatment of the extent to which the role of nuclear weapons in NATO's strategy should be scaled back. The French, the FRG's Strauss, and even some British officials were leading exponents of this theme. What stressed their nerves most was McNamara's contention that deterrence no longer should be NATO's sole goal, that NATO should begin preparing seriously for the prospect of actually fighting a war in Central Europe. Almost as stressful was McNamara's related argument that the Alliance no longer should plan to respond to conventional aggression by immediately bringing American strategic nuclear power to bear. The Allies perceived these propositions at best to be contradictory to their deeply held judgments about how stability was preserved and, at worst, to be in direct conflict with Western Europe's vital interests. To them,

McNamara seemed willing to accept the outbreak of war in Europe as a feasible policy choice and yet unwilling to employ the weapons that the United States for years had been claiming were NATO's only hope for prevailing in such a conflict. This was precisely the opposite of what they had come to expect from the United States and what they wanted to hear.

From the Allies' vantage point, McNamara's finger seemed too close to the nuclear trigger in one way and not close enough in another. While his stance reflected an understandable American perspective, it seemed likely both to weaken deterrence and to increase the likelihood of military defeat if war were to occur. To them, deterrence was driven not by operational military details but rather by the sheer danger of nuclear war. If NATO were to reduce Moscow's sense of danger by making escalation more controllable, deterrence inevitably would be weakened. And if NATO were also to swear off actually employing nuclear weapons early in a war, then NATO's forces hardly could hope to cope with the advancing Soviet Army. The result of this two-fold error in military strategy, they concluded, could be the very destructive war and subsequent Soviet occupation of Western Europe that NATO originally had been created to prevent.

To them, McNamara's hostility toward Allied independent nuclear forces and his insistence that they bolster their conventional defenses seemed doubly ironic. McNamara appeared to be weakening the American guarantee that was his sole argument against nuclear forces of their own. Simultaneously, he was urging them to abandon their own nuclear aspirations to fund a conventional buildup that promised to erode the credibility of NATO's threat to escalate, regardless of whether the U.S. nuclear pledge remained intact. Taken together, these arguments were more than most Allied governments were prepared to swallow.

McNamara, a man who preferred to erect NATO's strategy on a foundation of tight logic rather than a politically acceptable balance of competing perspectives, rejected these apprehensions. He insisted that a major goal of his new strategy was to enhance deterrence rather than weaken it. The previous strategy of massive retaliation, he argued, was no longer credible in Moscow. The new strategy would bolster deterrence by giving NATO credible options and by placing the onus of nuclear escalation on the Soviet Union's shoulders rather than on NATO's. In light of this gain, he said, any theoretical loss in deterrence due to the reduced automaticity of NATO's

nuclear response at most would be minor and would be more than offset by the gain accrued from providing NATO improved prospects for defending itself and for controlling escalation if war in fact occurred. To him, the Allies were so preoccupied with safeguarding deterrence that they seemed shortsightedly oblivious to the dangers that weak defenses and runaway escalation posed for Western Europe.<sup>6</sup>

The Allies, in turn, were taken aback by McNamara's summary rejection of their theories of deterrence. Some came to perceive in McNamara's relentless military logic an unspoken but profoundly disturbing political agenda, one that confirmed their deepest suspicions about American intentions. When the fog of argumentation was cleared away, they felt, a central fact stood out: The United States, now threatened by Soviet missiles, seemed to be backing away from its nuclear commitments in Europe. Washington evidently remained willing to fight a conventional war there and perhaps a tactical nuclear war as well. But, in the minds of McNamara's harshest critics, the American government no longer seemed willing to expose the United States to a Soviet nuclear attack. To them, American vital interests seemingly now extended to the point of sacrificing blood and treasure to protect Western Europe but not to placing at risk the physical survival of the United States itself. This dark thought clearly was on Charles de Gaulle's mind. He said so openly. The West Germans and other Europeans talked more discreetly in public, but in private many worried that de Gaulle might be right.

If the worst were true, many Allied experts concluded, the United States was not trying to enhance deterrence but instead was merely endeavoring to make Europe safe for a major conflagration that would inflict even more devastation than World War II. And by being so openly forthcoming about its views, Washington was explicitly signaling this new stance to the Soviets. It was telling them that it actually was willing to fight a war for control of Europe and was proposing ground rules for the conflict: that neither the United States nor the Soviet homeland would be brought under nuclear bombardment. In the process of making this announcement, the Allies feared, the United States was removing the major and perhaps only risk that could deter the Soviets from invading Western Europe. The prospect of a painful theater campaign would not deter the men in Moscow who had long since shown a willingness to spend Soviet lives and inflict widespread devastation in their quest for strategic gains.

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<sup>6</sup>See McNamara's annual reports and public testimony.

The Allies' reaction to McNamara's call for a conventional buildup stemmed primarily from these nuclear fears. Many Allied governments did not welcome American pressures to increase their spending on conventional defenses beyond what their domestic constituencies and national budgets would permit. But as a practical matter, most privately recognized that NATO's conventional forces needed strengthening and that a great deal could be done with even limited investments. To them, the problem was that McNamara had not only justified a conventional buildup as a worthy goal in itself, but also had portrayed it as the vehicle by which NATO could reduce its dependence on extended nuclear deterrence. This led them, especially in late 1962 and early 1963, to react negatively to a conventional buildup as a matter of principle. Fearing the larger strategy implications, they began throwing as many darts as possible at McNamara's arguments in favor of the feasibility of conventional defense. Their rejoinders were cast in largely technical terms that questioned McNamara's optimistic portrayal of the conventional balance. But their real agenda was nuclear.

McNamara's response to these Allied nuclear fears was that the United States was deploying over 7,000 tactical nuclear weapons to Europe and distributing them to the Allies for their use upon issuance of release authority. This, he pointed out, was not the behavior of a nation that was trying to disentangle itself from NATO's nuclear planning. The Allies offered the rejoinder that these weapons lacked a strategic dimension: They were mostly incapable of striking targets within the Soviet Union. The missiles and aircraft that were capable of long-range strike missions, they pointed out, remained exclusively under American command, control, and release authority. Moreover, symbols mattered to them as much as operational details. Their lack of command authority over strategic assets, they feared, created the impression that Western Europe had been relegated to a junior status whose interests might be subordinated to the goals of the superpowers.

In retrospect, McNamara marshaled better analysis and technical data than his European critics in this debate. He correctly had ascertained that the requirements of deterrence had changed and that NATO required a more flexible, less nuclear-reliant strategy if it was to achieve the multiple objectives that concerned all Alliance members. His analysis of the conventional balance, as many West European experts privately recognized, was on the mark. The Allied rejoinders were not entirely without merit, but on the whole they lacked the rigor, depth, and clarity of McNamara's arguments. In

particular, the Allies found themselves dubiously arguing that a more flexible strategy and stronger conventional defenses somehow weakened deterrence. They also placed themselves in the position of clinging to an inflated estimate of the threat and asserting that a major improvement in NATO's posture was not worth the marginal price it would cost. Beyond doubt, this left McNamara holding the analytical high ground.

However, friends can be lost by winning arguments, especially when more is involved than cool logic. Something of this sort happened here. The Allies were reacting to what they perceived as a hidden agenda in McNamara's stance that violated the bonds of mutual trust and shared interests that united the Alliance. Their behavior was driven as much by visceral emotions as by a purely intellectual appraisal of the issues. In fairness to Kennedy and McNamara, West European skeptics misinterpreted American motives and were slow to recognize how Washington's strategy agenda served their own interests. But in the strategy controversy that embroiled NATO in late 1962, Allied misperceptions and suspicions became so deeply ingrained that they could not be easily corrected, especially overnight. As a result, the debate itself began to become a barrier to constructive change rather than the engine of progress that Washington originally had hoped it would be.

Indeed, the entire Alliance seemed to be coming apart at the seams. The British government began treating Washington with a wariness that had not been seen since the divisive Suez crisis in 1956. In Paris, de Gaulle stepped up his criticism of the United States and his advocacy of major changes within the Alliance to enhance France's influence. In Bonn, Adenauer increasingly showed signs of joining the pro-Gaullist faction of the CDU. Perhaps most ominously, Strauss began talking openly of a possible West German move to develop its own nuclear deterrent. Similar signs of nervousness appeared elsewhere across Western Europe. These trends pointed in one direction: the fracturing of NATO's unity in ways that would have undermined one of the most important goals of Alliance military strategy.

## V. THE SEARCH FOR NUCLEAR SOLUTIONS

Largely because the Kennedy administration acted in time to shore up the deteriorating situation, this divisive strategy debate was to give way to a more constructive search for solutions, a subject to which this narrative now turns. The solutions being sought, at least at first, were nuclear in nature. The Alliance's efforts to find an acceptable nuclear sharing arrangement, however, helped set the political stage for NATO's later movement to a new military strategy calling for greater conventional strength. These events are so intertwined that they cannot be explained in each other's absence.

By late 1962, it had become apparent to Washington that mounting Allied distrust over U.S. intentions meant that no movement could be made toward a revised NATO strategy until Western Europe's nuclear apprehensions first were laid to rest. This realization, reinforced by growing concern over NATO's unity, led the Kennedy administration to begin shifting its political strategy within the Alliance. While it did not abandon its hopes for eventual strategy reform, it recognized that success could come only after passions had cooled, political cohesion had been restored, and several building blocks first had been put into place. Accordingly, it decided to temper its public rhetoric and instead to address strategy and posture issues primarily in the privacy of NATO's planning councils, where a sober dialogue was more possible. Equally important, it decided to place primary emphasis on finding a nuclear solution that would quell Allied fears about the U.S. commitment to extended deterrence. The task of forging a NATO consensus behind a conventional buildup was temporarily set aside until the divisive nuclear problem was settled.<sup>1</sup>

This approach did not mean that conventional defense was discarded completely from Kennedy's agenda. In a quiet way, McNamara continued his dialogue with the Allies about the conventional balance. He also launched an effort to reform NATO's force planning machinery by introducing the techniques—systems analysis and the Planning, Programming, and Budgeting System (PPBS)—that he had developed in the Pentagon. Further, he began working closely with NATO's military commanders and

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<sup>1</sup>Interview material. See Stromseth, 1988, for further analysis.

Allied governments to find practical, low cost ways to improve U.S. and West European forces. But he temporarily set aside his vocal advocacy of a strategy change that linked stronger conventional defenses to reduced reliance on nuclear weapons. To some degree, then, he finessed the problem. This tactic disappointed some of his aides, who felt that a continued pursuit of the hard sell was best. But as a practical matter, he had little choice but to proceed through consensus building from the bottom up. Especially in this sensitive area, alliance politics was, after all, the art of the possible.

In the Kennedy administration's parallel efforts to pursue a nuclear accord, attention focused on specific forces and institutional arrangements. But these were surface manifestations of a deeper, more subtle issue. Washington's new strategy promised to make escalation a conditional matter of judgment, rather than an automatic feature of NATO's war plans. On this matter of judgment, important transatlantic differences seemed capable of arising in a crisis. The underlying issue, therefore, was one of determining how responsibility could be shared for high-level political decisions among potentially disagreeing partners. American desires to retain firm control over these decisions needed to be reconciled with the Allies' growing insistence on establishing a strong measure of control for themselves. The following three years were consumed largely in an effort to find a solution to this troublesome problem that would be acceptable on both sides of the Atlantic.

## **BACKGROUND**

NATO's first attempt to find a satisfactory mechanism for meeting its nuclear requirements had been made in 1957-1959 when 104 American IRBMs were emplaced in the United Kingdom, Italy, and Turkey (but not West Germany). At the time, these weapons were a valuable addition because they provided NATO a modest capability to strike Soviet targets while helping reassure the West Europeans. However, these missiles also suffered from important operational drawbacks. They were deployed at fixed sites above ground, which made them vulnerable to a preemptive strike, and had low readiness since they were liquid-fueled. Also, too few of them were deployed to meet SACEUR's need for 300-700 missiles to cover the most important Soviet targets. As a result, they were regarded as an interim measure, and the United States intended to withdraw them as soon as ICBMs became available.

Once the IRBMs had been withdrawn, the U.S. government intended to meet NATO's missile needs with ICBMs and SLBMs under its own control, and it was not enthused about the idea of permanently deploying a follow-on long-range missile on the European continent. However, SACEUR and a growing number of West Europeans, less content with exclusive U.S. control over NATO's retaliatory forces, already were beginning to see things differently. As a result, in the late 1950s General Norstad proposed deployment of a force of several hundred mobile MRBMs that would be placed under his own command. This idea represented a marked departure from the IRBM model. The Jupiter and Thor missiles had remained entirely under U.S. control. By contrast, Norstad's MRBM scheme promised to make NATO itself a nuclear power. Technical studies at SHAPE fastened on the Polaris as an appropriate missile: Solid-fueled and adaptable to a land-mobile launcher, it could reach targets well inside the Soviet Union.

Norstad's proposal never got beyond the design stage, primarily because the U.S. government expressed little interest in supporting it. One reason for Washington's cool stance was that the MRBMs, when deployed forward to reach a maximum number of targets, could become enmeshed in ground combat and might either be captured or prematurely released. Also, even with as many as 700 MRBMs, SACEUR still would be dependent upon U.S. strategic forces to accomplish all his targeting missions. From the American standpoint, little purpose seemed to be served by making SACEUR independent enough to initiate a strategic nuclear war but not capable of prosecuting it to completion.

Norstad's proposal, however, had whetted West European appetites for a missile force that would help reduce NATO's complete dependence on U.S.-controlled systems. Mounting pressure from the Allies led Washington to begin searching for a compromise. In December 1960, outgoing Secretary of State Christian Herter made a new proposal that was intended to help substitute for Norstad's scheme. He expressed an American willingness to place five Polaris submarines and their 80 SLBM missiles under SACEUR's control for targeting purposes. He also suggested that the Alliance might band together to create a seaborne NATO nuclear force. Herter further indicated that, assuming agreement could be reached on control over launch authority, the United States would be willing to provide this force some 100 MRBM missiles. Coming on the eve of Eisenhower's departure from office, Herter's proposal was not directly acted upon, but it



nonetheless marked an important political step. By officially stating that some way should be found to "couple" U.S. forces to NATO's defense plans and even to provide NATO a retaliatory force of its own, it expressed U.S. acknowledgment that the old nuclear command and control arrangements were no longer adequate for preserving Alliance unity.

It was against this background that the Kennedy administration began addressing the troublesome nuclear sharing issue shortly after it assumed office. The new administration soon found itself divided internally between two broad alternatives on how to proceed.<sup>2</sup> The first alternative aimed at establishing what might best be called a "federated multinational" NATO nuclear force. This concept called for a collection of existing national forces that would remain under the control of their parent nations but would operate, to one degree or another, under NATO's command. The goal was to give NATO a de facto nuclear force that it could draw upon in a crisis, without making the Alliance itself an independent nuclear power. The structure was to be brought to life through intensified coalition planning in such areas as force development, doctrine, and targeting procedures. The United States was to contribute to this enterprise by more extensively coordinating its nuclear planning with NATO Headquarters and by assigning a number of its Polaris SLBM submarines to SACEUR. The British and, it was hoped, the French—the only other NATO powers with strategic forces of their own—were to follow suit.

The second alternative was a good deal more ambitious and controversial. It called for the creation of a "Multilateral Force" (MLF) under NATO's control. This was to be an entirely new force that would supplement existing national postures to give the Alliance itself—as opposed to its members acting individually—an independent nuclear capability. A variety of options were considered in the 1960s, the most prominent being an MLF composed of a fleet of 25 NATO-assigned surface ships armed with a total of 200 Polaris missiles; each ship was to carry a multinational crew. It was to be operationally assigned to SACEUR, but launch authority was to be controlled by a senior NATO political committee composed of representatives from each contributing nation. Launch decisions were to be taken by unanimous vote. This meant that the United States, or any other member nation, would be able to exercise veto power over the use of the MLF's missiles.

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<sup>2</sup>Schwartz, *NATO's Nuclear Dilemmas*, provides an appraisal of these alternatives.

The MLF gained its inspiration primarily from political and diplomatic concerns and drew its support in Washington principally from senior State Department officials. Its sponsors saw it as a convenient vehicle for reassuring the NATO Allies in a highly visible way and thereby discouraging further proliferation, while keeping nuclear missiles off the European landmass and still under effective U.S. control. In particular, the MLF promised to help keep West Germany tightly bound to NATO and the United States. Beyond this, the MLF would compel the West Europeans to work together on a highly important common defense enterprise. In this way, its advocates believed, it could be a useful mechanism for encouraging further West European political integration.

The MLF, however, did not go down well in the Pentagon, which was primarily concerned with the military feasibility of any nuclear sharing arrangement. McNamara's own views, which were tilted against MLF, can best be understood when seen in a larger context. McNamara adamantly believed that NATO needed to be capable of conducting its nuclear operations in a swift and coordinated fashion. To achieve this, strategic forces needed to be kept under a unified command structure that could establish a coherent doctrine and make sound, timely employment decisions. He particularly worried that U.S. efforts to confine initial strikes to Soviet military targets would be undermined by the targeting doctrines of individual Allies, which would probably be focused on Soviet cities. As a result, his overriding goal was not to block the MLF per se, but rather to discourage national nuclear forces, which would be of limited effectiveness and produce fragmentation.<sup>3</sup>

He also opposed Allied development of independent nuclear forces for budgetary reasons. For the United States, strategic forces were not especially costly, only about 10 percent of the DoD budget. But each ally would be compelled to spend 25-50 percent of its much smaller budget for even a modest nuclear posture and thus would have to sharply pare back spending on other defense programs. France was already doing this, as was the United Kingdom. The result inevitably would have been an unbalanced Alliance posture: one overly insured in nuclear capability but even weaker than before in the conventional defenses that McNamara believed needed to be strengthened.

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<sup>3</sup>See McNamara's public statements and congressional testimony on the MLF and Allied national nuclear forces.

In an ideal world, McNamara would have preferred to retain all strategic nuclear matters under American control. In justifying this stance, he argued that since the United States was committed to Western Europe's security as a matter of its own supreme national interests, it could be relied upon to employ its strategic forces on the NATO Allies' behalf. Although opposed to uncoordinated national efforts, he did acknowledge that an integrated all-European missile force might become desirable in the event that the Allies achieved sufficient political unity to perform the required command and control functions. But European political integration of this sort, he asserted, was far off in the future. In the interim, the present system was best.

McNamara was well aware that existing Allied national forces and Allied insistence on some form of improved nuclear sharing with the United States were realities that could not be ignored. For this reason, he maintained that he was not opposed to sharing nuclear control with the Allies if they wanted such an arrangement. But this goal, he insisted, would have to be achieved in a manner that was consistent with operational requirements. The trick was to create a command structure that both satisfied political concerns on both sides of the Alliance and was militarily feasible.

The MLF, McNamara believed, failed the test of military feasibility. Its small size added little to NATO's nuclear arsenal. With only 200 missiles, it fell far short of being able to execute NATO's war plans alone and thus could not be used independently of U.S. forces. Its cumbersome command arrangement, requiring unanimous consensus from its members, threatened to inhibit swift operations. And its multinational crew and funding arrangements promised to cause many practical problems in procuring the force, training it, and operating it. As a result, McNamara wanted to seek an acceptable sharing arrangement through the "federation" alternative: an avenue that he believed could help satisfy the Allies while maintaining a command structure, doctrine, and force posture that made military sense.

The White House was in accord with him on important fundamentals: The United States should strive for an acceptable sharing arrangement that would discourage further proliferation and keep long-range nuclear missiles off the European continent. The State Department, however, by no means shared McNamara's specific priorities since it was more impressed by the MLF's political advantages than its military drawbacks. The Kennedy administration thus found itself divided internally. Despite continuous internal study, it was unable to resolve its internal disagreements on exactly what kind of solution

should be advocated to the Allies. Consequently, it ended up tabling both alternatives to NATO, without firmly endorsing either one. This approach was not wholly inconsistent for the simple reason that these alternatives were not mutually exclusive: Both conceivably could have been implemented. But it had the effect of granting a broad range of choice to the Allies, who themselves were internally divided and prone to developing their own options. The result was a prolonged period of dialogue, debate, and indecision that delayed the Alliance's ability to settle on a concrete course. A prolonged Alliance-wide debate ensued, one that pushed strategy matters into the background.

### **RISE AND FALL OF THE MLF**

Throughout 1961, most West European nations had voiced little interest in either American proposal. In a May 1961 address at Ottawa, Kennedy offered a combination of both solutions: the commitment of U.S. Polaris submarines to NATO and U.S. help in establishing an MLF provided that NATO first met its nonnuclear force goals. His proposal elicited only a lukewarm response. In the wake of McNamara's 1962 Athens address and mounting European fears of American nuclear disengagement, however, interest began picking up. In particular, Bonn, now expressing interest in entering the nuclear club, floated a design proposal for an MLF that would be entirely European and would not include the United States. Although the British were cool to the MLF idea and the French adamantly opposed it, the Belgians voiced interest along with the Italians, Greeks, and Turks. Canada, Portugal, Norway, and Denmark turned the idea down directly.

As debate mounted steadily in the following months, with participants divided between the MLF and some version of the multinational option, outside events played an important role in guiding things along. In October that year, the Cuban Missile Crisis occurred. In many ways this crisis, which was resolved successfully but badly strained nerves everywhere, proved to be a watershed in European security affairs. For the United States, it was a resounding victory. Years later analysts would ascribe the outcome to the U.S. superiority in strategic nuclear weapons, which at the time was marked because the Soviets still lacked a large and invulnerable ICBM force. To some participants in the Kennedy administration, however, the U.S. nuclear advantage was a factor of less importance than the local U.S. superiority in conventional forces. What

unquestionably did matter was that the United States, acting independently, was able to exert a large element of control over its actions throughout the crisis. This reinforced Washington's belief that management of any confrontation with the Soviet Union, especially decisions regarding use of conventional or nuclear forces, must be kept under tight central control.<sup>4</sup>

In Western Europe, Kennedy's skillful handling of the crisis got positive reviews, but the entire incident left ambivalent feelings on how future crises should be managed. The crisis graphically illustrated to the Allies how a U.S.-Soviet confrontation elsewhere on the globe could trigger a nuclear war that easily might engulf Europe. To them, it increased the importance not only of maintaining close collaboration with the United States, but also of achieving a nuclear sharing arrangement that would ensure an influential role for them in any future crisis. With respect to nuclear command and control, the crisis thus led the Allies to draw lessons that were somewhat at odds with what Washington had concluded.

The Cuban Missile Crisis also proved to be a watershed in U.S.-Soviet relations that was to have an indirect, in some ways negative effect on the nuclear sharing debate. The crisis, which brought the two sides perilously close to war, led Kennedy to conclude that the time had arrived for an effort to reduce tensions with Moscow. From that point forward, he began stressing the goal of stable relations, a goal that was best exemplified in his landmark speech at the American University the following spring. The Soviets reciprocated, and the two nations began searching for ways to reach concrete agreements.

The West Europeans generally shared Washington's growing interest in exploring the prospects for better relations with the Soviets, especially if this could ease tensions in Europe. But some Allies began to be concerned that purely bilateral U.S.-Soviet negotiations might produce deals at their expense. In particular, de Gaulle, who had long warned of a superpower condominium, intensified his complaints about American domination of the Alliance. Similarly, the West Germans, perpetually nervous about the U.S. stance on such issues as Berlin and American force levels in Europe, began growing wary. This further strengthened the Allies' determination to impart their own stamp to any NATO nuclear sharing agreement.

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<sup>4</sup>Interview material. Evidently the Soviets themselves believed that the adverse nuclear balance (from their standpoint) was an important factor in the crisis. This thesis was to become prevalent in Western accounts only several years later when the Soviets were threatening to surpass the United States in total nuclear forces.

Matters had begun coming to a head late in the fall of 1962, when Kennedy, acting on McNamara's advice, canceled plans to develop the nuclear-tipped Skybolt missile. This missile had been intended for emplacement on U.S. strategic bombers as a means of penetrating Soviet air defenses. It was canceled on cost and effectiveness grounds when operational testing showed it to be flawed. This step promptly triggered a serious crisis in U.S.-British relations. The United States previously had promised to sell Skybolt to the British, and the Macmillan government had made it a centerpiece of its efforts to build an independent, bomber-oriented British nuclear deterrent. Not fully consulted in advance by the Americans, Macmillan found himself in a deeply embarrassing position.<sup>5</sup>

Kennedy and Macmillan met in Nassau in late December 1962 and discussed the Skybolt problem in depth. After reviewing several options, they ultimately settled on a plan in which the United States agreed to sell Polaris missiles to the British, and the U.K. would install them in submarines built by itself and equipped with its own nuclear warheads. In turn, these submarines, along with an equal number of U.S. Polaris submarines, would be assigned to NATO and targeted in accordance with NATO plans. The British reserved the right to withdraw these submarines and to use them of their own accord when the United Kingdom's supreme national interests were at stake. The Nassau accord, which helped heal the rift in U.S.-British relations, had the effect of taking the first formal steps toward creation of the multinational structure.

NATO formally endorsed the Nassau decision the following May, when the ministers met in Ottawa. There, the ministers adopted procedures to better coordinate NATO's nuclear planning and to provide SACEUR adequate assets to execute his nuclear strike plans. Although the formal communique contained ambiguous language that kept the MLF idea alive, the Ottawa meeting took no formal action to endorse further progress on it. Most participants returned home believing that because of its military drawbacks, which increasingly had become apparent in recent months, the MLF concept had fallen from favor in both Washington and West European capitals.<sup>6</sup>

The MLF, however, was by no means dead. It gained a new lease on life in early 1963 when Charles de Gaulle, angry at both Washington and London, rejected a similar American offer to sell Polaris to Paris and refused to participate in any kind of NATO

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<sup>5</sup>Henry A. Kissinger, *The Troubled Partnership: A Reappraisal of the Atlantic Alliance*, Doubleday, New York, 1966, provides an insightful account of the Skybolt missile crisis that is sympathetic to the British and French.

<sup>6</sup>See Schwartz, *NATO's Nuclear Dilemmas*.

nuclear force. In addition, he vetoed British entry into the Common Market and shortly afterward signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with West Germany. These steps were to bring the Alliance to the brink of an internal crisis, one in which the MLF became embroiled.

De Gaulle's actions stemmed partly from purely military motives. Believing that the United States would never place its own cities at nuclear risk to protect its overseas interests, he had come openly to discount American nuclear guarantees to Europe. He believed that only West Europeans could credibly threaten nuclear retaliation in response to a Soviet invasion of West European soil. Nor did he see any purpose in conventional defense and graduated nuclear response, American ideas that to him were aimed at avoiding intercontinental war rather than protecting Western Europe. These conclusions led him to pursue a French "force de frappe," a small national nuclear posture aimed directly at Soviet cities that would be employed upon a decision by Paris that French supreme interests were at peril. They also motivated him to oppose NATO nuclear command arrangements that strengthened American control over Europe's nuclear decisions while conveying the false impression that U.S. guarantees were reliable. To him, the proper solution was a command arrangement outside NATO that brought the West European nations together, preferably under French leadership. Nassau and Ottawa were steps in the opposite direction, and he refused to take any part in them.<sup>7</sup>

De Gaulle's rejection of the Nassau/Ottawa Accords also stemmed from larger political and economic motives that went well beyond the specific nuclear issues at stake. At the time, important elements of the Kennedy administration were openly endorsing a "Grand Design" for Europe. This concept envisioned the evolution of a politically and economically integrated West European pillar, one that could stand alongside (but not replace) the United States as a source of strength in a troubled world. Traditional European national identities were to decline in importance as this unified Western Europe emerged. In this concept, the Atlantic partnership was to be maintained not only through close political and economic ties, but also by the continued existence of NATO and its integrated military structure, and by continued West European nuclear

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<sup>7</sup>A key point here is that while the British nuclear force was intended for integration within NATO's command structure, the French force was deployed with wider political goals in mind. McGeorge Bundy's *Danger and Survival* provides an appraisal of White House views on relations with France, as well as with West Germany. Ch. 10, pp. 463-517.

dependence on the United States. De Gaulle's actions in 1963 were aimed at striking a death blow to the heart of this idea.<sup>8</sup>

In de Gaulle's eyes, Washington's design looked anything but grand. He believed that in its emphasis on integration in Europe, it both misunderstood Europe's history and unacceptably subordinated France's own self-identity and grandeur as an independent nation. To de Gaulle, the "Grand Design" was anchored on American objectives rather than West European interests. Rather than erecting a united Western Europe that behaved independently in response to its own goals, the Grand Design seemed aimed at preserving a Western Europe that continued to take its instructions from Washington. To him, NATO was Washington's primary instrument of control, and Allied nuclear dependence on the United States was the lever that enabled the Americans to employ this instrument to its own advantage.

As a result, de Gaulle's nuclear stance was an outgrowth of a far-reaching political campaign aimed at challenging U.S. domination in Europe and weakening the control that the Americans exercised through NATO. As part of this campaign, de Gaulle was endeavoring to keep Britain, which he dismissed as Washington's Trojan Horse, out of Western Europe's efforts to achieve integration on its own terms. Beyond merely removing France and Western Europe from Washington's grasp, he also was offering an alternative source of leadership on the continent. In his design, Western Europe was to achieve a separate identity through the combined effects of economic integration under the European Economic Community's auspices and military coordination that would rest on a French-German axis led by Paris.

De Gaulle also had a uniquely French view on how European security affairs as a whole were to be managed. Resentful of the United States but suspicious of the Russians, de Gaulle proposed to create a Europe stretching "from the Atlantic to the Urals." His concept aimed to build more harmonious relations with the USSR by acknowledging the Soviet Union's vital security interests in Eastern Europe. For this reason, he did not support Bonn's quest for unification. At the same time, he was no accommodationist and believed that the West needed to maintain a military counterbalance to Soviet power. This counterbalance, however, was to be provided by Western Europe, not by a U.S.-led NATO.

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<sup>8</sup>See Schwartz, *NATO's Nuclear Dilemmas*, and Stromseth, *The Origins of Flexible Response*.



Although de Gaulle recognized the need for West European unity and strength, he stopped well short of endorsing the visionary idea of a fully integrated European Community. He saw the Common Market as an economic entity and did not want to see it grow into the kind of politically integrated body that would erode French sovereignty. Nor did he favor any integrative scheme that would result in Germany's becoming Western Europe's leader. The essence of his vision was a loosely connected group of West European nations, with France as its leader and West Germany in a subordinate position, that would operate independently of both Washington and Moscow.

The key to de Gaulle's vision was the FRG, and in Bonn de Gaulle got a mixed reception. West Germany's willingness to sign the Friendship and Cooperation Treaty was an indicator that the conservative Adenauer government shared some Gaullist sympathies. However, the Germans were unenthusiastic about the idea of sacrificing their security relationship with the United States in exchange for dependence on France. De Gaulle's design implied that West Germany would play a secondary role to France, a concept not inherently different from the American domination that de Gaulle so strongly opposed for France. Also, de Gaulle's nuclear guarantees to Bonn were no more credible than Washington's promises. The chief difference was that the United States possessed vastly more nuclear power than France, enough to match the Soviets in all phases of nuclear warfare rather than merely threaten mutual suicide. These considerations led the Germans to favor a flirtatious relationship with de Gaulle but one that fell short of serious courtship, much less marriage.

Nonetheless, de Gaulle's demarche to Bonn made enough headway to ring alarm bells in Washington. Accordingly, Washington revived the MLF, notwithstanding its still-unresolved military deficiencies, as a way to restore German confidence in American leadership. During the following months, American officials canvassed Western Europe in an attempt to mobilize support for prompt action on it. By late 1963, this effort had gained some ground. The United States and key Allies had agreed to begin formal negotiations on an MLF, and the United States had offered a surface vessel to serve as a pilot project to test the concept. This progress led the MLF's supporters in Washington to conclude that the way finally appeared clear for getting an MLF actually deployed in the next year or two.

The events of 1964 were to prove otherwise. Discussions with the Allies revealed less enthusiasm than MLF advocates had hoped to elicit. The French remained strongly

opposed to any form of nuclear cooperation that would compromise their national force. In London, Macmillan was willing to participate; but support for MLF did not run deep in the British government, which valued its independent nuclear status and its unique relationship with Washington. With the other Allies politely supportive at best, this left the West Germans as the MLF's main enthusiasts. But even in Bonn, the picture was murky. Support for the MLF was concentrated primarily among CDU politicians, who ran the government. Although they favored the MLF because it would give the FRG some access to strategic nuclear forces, their interest was tempered by the realization that the United States would retain veto power over it. Meanwhile the SPD largely opposed MLF, and the professional military harbored reservations based on the same operational difficulties that McNamara had pointed out.

As 1964 unfolded, even the CDU's support began to wane. An important contributing factor was de Gaulle's intense opposition to the MLF. The same CDU figures who favored the MLF also were pro-Gaullist; they began displaying reluctance to support an American initiative that France opposed and regarded as a test of its relations with the FRG. Events in London reinforced Bonn's hesitancy. In October, Macmillan left office and was succeeded by Harold Wilson of the Labor Party, which was even more lukewarm to MLF than the conservatives. With London becoming increasingly ambivalent, Bonn backed away even further.

These trends in Europe were matched by important developments in the United States. Kennedy's assassination in November 1963 had propelled Lyndon Johnson to the presidency, and he was neither thoroughly versed on MLF nor committed to it. Congress showed no special interest in the MLF, and when Johnson became aware that the Europeans themselves were losing interest, he began backing away. In late 1964, he decided to cease advocating MLF and to support it only if the Europeans actively pushed it. When they failed to do so, he decided to abandon the idea altogether.<sup>9</sup>

## **TOWARD A NUCLEAR ACCORD**

The MLF's demise left the way open for a resolution of the nuclear sharing debate on the basis of the Nassau/Ottawa accords. This implied further steps in the direction of

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<sup>9</sup>From this point forward, the MLF slipped steadily into the background. It was to continue under examination in several quarters, but lacking White House support, it no longer was a serious candidate in NATO's reviews.

integrating U.S. nuclear forces into NATO's defense plans and establishing better transatlantic consultative mechanisms. The exact terms of agreement, however, remained to be determined. Especially given France's continued naysaying, substantial discord still existed within the Alliance and consensus formation did not promise to be easy.

Fortunately, by late 1964 nuclear politics in Europe had started to simmer down from the boiling point that had been reached two years earlier. This process had begun in May 1963, when the United States agreed to establish a staff liaison relationship between SHAPE and SAC Headquarters at Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska, in order to achieve better coordination of strategic targeting. SHAPE officers were assigned to SAC's Joint Strategic Target Planning Staff there. In addition to accomplishing its technical purposes, this step had the beneficial effect of inspiring greater confidence among Allied capitals that U.S. strategic forces remained committed to Europe's defense.

Moreover, McNamara by 1964 had begun to alter his public rhetoric about how a nuclear war should be conducted, a step that further helped ameliorate transatlantic tensions. In particular, McNamara steadily backed away from his earlier endorsement of the "no cities" or "counterforce" doctrine that had so inflamed many West Europeans. The reasons why he took this step were controversial then, and remain so today. One obvious reason was that the counterforce doctrine's emphasis on restraint and escalation control had directly contributed to the upswing in Allied doubts about the continued credibility of extended deterrence. By deemphasizing this doctrine, McNamara was trying to calm Allied fears on this score.<sup>10</sup> An equally important, more fundamental reason was that the counterforce doctrine was contributing to confusion on both sides of

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<sup>10</sup>Interview material. See Kugler, "The Politics of Restraint." Paul Nitze's book *From Hiroshima to Glasnost* also provides an account of why counterforce was replaced by assured destruction. McNamara's annual reports failed to provide a full explanation. Assured destruction and its twin damage limitation made their appearance with little analysis of the implications for counterforce and flexible response. Within DoD's internal studies, the forces needed for these two missions were regarded to be subsumed within the requirements for the two parent strategic concepts. In other words, the offensive forces needed for assured destruction and damage limitation were regarded to be fully adequate to execute any of the lesser demanding options that counterforce and flexible response might require. In essence, the Pentagon proceeded to *size* its forces according to the new concepts, but to *design* them—along with war plans and associated programs—in ways that accommodated the need to respond in limited ways and to strike enemy targets. Late in his tenure, McNamara was to acknowledge this important distinction during congressional testimony.

the Atlantic on McNamara's basic message about the unacceptability of nuclear war. McNamara had not changed his belief that U.S. nuclear forces must continue to provide multiple war-fighting options. But he also had come to conclude that the counterforce doctrine was creating the impression that Washington seriously believed a nuclear war could be fought and won. This was exactly the opposite of what McNamara, who believed that nuclear war should be avoided at almost all costs, had wanted to impart.

McNamara also had become concerned about a related problem with the counterforce doctrine: its unattractive fiscal implications. By early 1964, he had come to the conclusion that since the American nuclear buildup was now firmly in place, DoD's funding priorities should be shifted more toward conventional defenses. Within the Pentagon the counterforce doctrine tended to create an open-ended requirement for large strategic forces that left him in a poor position for turning aside programs that he believed were unnecessary. While this particularly applied to service pressures for more ICBM missiles and strategic bombers, it also was the case for controlling deployment of an expensive antiballistic missile (ABM) system, pressures for which were beginning to build in 1964. For this reason also, a deemphasis on counterforce made sense.

From 1964 onward McNamara ceased talking publicly about the counterforce doctrine and the use of nuclear forces as a political instrument for crisis management. In the private councils of government, he continued to support planning efforts to achieve greater flexibility in nuclear targeting and employment doctrine. But in public, he began justifying the Pentagon's offensive nuclear programs under the rubric of a new, entirely different doctrinal concept: "assured destruction." This concept postulated that the dominant goal of ICBMs, SLBMs, and bombers was to deter nuclear war through their ability to conduct a retaliatory attack against enemy cities. In marked contrast with its predecessor, it said nothing about their role in conducting other kinds of operations, including the targeting of enemy forces. Nor did it say anything about the requirement for multiple options or about the need to control escalation. The vision of nuclear war that it sketched was one of a massive, city-busting exchange from the onset, the kind of conflict that, given the vulnerability of cities, could be waged with a fairly small number of nuclear missiles.

With respect to the ABM, McNamara articulated a sister concept to assured destruction: "damage limitation." This concept postulated that the purpose of an ABM system was to protect U.S. urban areas from a Soviet missile strike. On the surface, it

appeared to pave the way to a massive investment in an ABM system. But in reality it had the opposite effect. Pentagon analyses in 1963-1964 had shown that this mission was budgetarily and militarily infeasible. A large ABM system would cost far more than DoD could afford, and it easily could be checkmated by modest increases in Soviet offensive missile forces. The United States therefore would wind up with an albatross that succeeded only in stimulating a further counterproductive spiral in the arms race.<sup>11</sup>

Although these two concepts had little to say about how nuclear operations would probably be conducted in an actual NATO-Warsaw Pact war, they proved to be useful instruments of rhetorical policy in McNamara's hands. Within the Pentagon, they gave him a host of good arguments for turning aside service recommendations for new nuclear weapons. Publicly, they helped him convey the message that nuclear war could not be won. In effect, they said that since mutual destruction was assured and damage could only be limited, nuclear war was a losing proposition for both sides. They thus helped McNamara to underscore the centrality of deterrence. From 1964 onward, McNamara aggressively used these concepts in his efforts to shape both the American debate on nuclear policy and the transatlantic dialogue as well. The counterforce doctrine steadily slipped from public view and soon was largely forgotten.

For all its controversy in the United States, McNamara's new stance on nuclear doctrine had a salutary effect in Western Europe. To military experts, assured destruction raised troublesome questions about how the U.S. strategic arsenal would be used to deal with a war in Europe. But in the public domain, McNamara's new concepts signalled to the Allies that the United States was getting its policy bearings straight, that it was coming to recognize that deterrence, not fighting a war, should be NATO's main goal. The Allies also raised no objections to McNamara's stance against the ABM, a system that in theory could have protected Western Europe as well as the United States, but would have been expensive and, in the USSR's hands, could have negated the British and French deterrent postures. In general they adopted an attitude of contentment toward a U.S. strategy that now had become anchored, in rhetoric if not in actual practice, on assured destruction alone.

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<sup>11</sup>The mathematical analyses supporting these policy conclusions were presented in an important internal DoD study called the "Damage Limitation Study" prepared by OSD with service and JCS collaboration. See McNamara's annual reports for quantitative analyses of why the damage limitation objective was deemed unattainable.

Events in the arms control arena reinforced this trend toward U.S.-Allied accord on nuclear doctrine. In the wake of the Cuban Missile Crisis had come important breakthroughs in East-West relations. The signing of the Limited Test Ban Treaty in 1963 was followed in 1964 by tentative efforts on both sides to signal a willingness to negotiate on further accords. The United States initially proposed a force reduction by mutual example; although this idea was rejected by the Soviets, it marked an important internal departure for the United States. The Soviets responded by issuing a vague call for improved overall security relations in Europe, one that lacked sufficient specificity to interest the West. But the Soviets also expressed a guarded willingness to expand the negotiatory process that the Test Ban Treaty had started. Moscow's signals, in turn, led the United States and its Allies to begin identifying negotiating options that looked promising.

It was here that the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) entered the equation in a way that helped speed a U.S.-Allied accord on nuclear sharing. At the time, there were few prospects for East-West negotiations on core political issues in Central Europe: Berlin remained unsolvable and the West German government still clung to its Hallstein doctrine, which denied diplomatic recognition to the East German state. Prospects for initiating negotiations on strategic nuclear forces were a distant hope, but support had only begun to bubble up within the U.S. government, and the Soviets as yet were showing no interest. This left negotiations on a nonproliferation accord as the next obvious item on the arms control agenda.<sup>12</sup>

The West German government, feeling that it was being singled out, reacted negatively to a nonproliferation agreement. But apart from Bonn's hostility, the United States and most West European nations favored the idea not only for its specifics but also because it could help promote the cause of better East-West relations. When the Soviets were approached on this idea, they reacted ambivalently. They expressed willingness to enter formal negotiations, but only if NATO abandoned any plans to deploy an MLF or

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<sup>12</sup>Although East-West tensions in Europe began relaxing after the Cuban Missile Crisis, it was to be several years before negotiations on European issues—Berlin, postwar borders, and mutual balanced force reduction (MBFR)—were to begin. In the interim, control of proliferation was an issue on which both the United States and the Soviet Union shared interests. A nonproliferation treaty, however, promised to deny the FRG and other nonnuclear NATO powers permanent access to a national deterrent, something that they were not eager to endorse in the absence of nuclear-sharing guarantees from the United States.

any other nuclear arrangement that might place strategic weapons directly in the hands of the West Germans. This response, in turn, put a final nail in the MLF's coffin. Equally important, it gave the United States and its West European Allies an incentive to bury the hatchet on nuclear sharing. Before an NPT could possibly be signed, NATO needed to have its own internal house in order, thereby reassuring West Germany and other partners that they safely could forswear any interest in going nuclear.

As a result of greater transatlantic harmony on nuclear strategy and improving East-West relations, most West European Allies began to conclude that they could accept a nuclear sharing agreement on the terms that the United States was offering. In particular, they slowly warmed to the idea that they could live with continued American control over nuclear release authority provided they were given an opportunity to participate in development of U.S. forces, doctrine, and targeting plans. Eventually even the West German government, sensing that the MLF was dead and that an NPT was inevitable, decided to make the best of a distasteful situation by endorsing this course. The emergence of this new attitude, in turn, pointed the way toward adoption of institutional changes within NATO that helped bring about a satisfactory settlement of the Alliance's nuclear controversies.

In reaction to the Allies' more forthcoming stance, in mid-1965 McNamara proposed the establishment of a formal NATO committee to examine ways for achieving consultation on nuclear planning. Although the French dismissed this idea as trivial, the British reacted enthusiastically and the Germans, after initial hesitations, agreed as well. Once the other Allies had followed suit, a Special Committee of Defense Ministers was created in November 1965, with nearly all NATO members (minus France) participating. The work of this committee and its two subgroups gave rise a year later to establishment of a Nuclear Planning Group (NPG), a new body composed of the United States, Great Britain, West Germany, Italy, and three other members on a rotating basis. The NPG was assigned the task of engaging in extensive consultations on nuclear policy issues on a regular basis, with the particular mission of ensuring that the Allies had a full opportunity to review U.S. plans and to participate in the development of new programs for NATO.

The NPG's efforts during 1966 and 1967 proved to be successful. This partially was due to McNamara himself, who went to considerable lengths to expose the Allies to the details of American planning. He candidly discussed the doctrinal issues at stake, listened carefully to Allied reactions, and was responsive to them. As a result, Allied

concerns lessened perceptibly and the thorny issue of control over U.S. nuclear forces faded into the background. The Alliance's nuclear crisis that had been triggered in 1962 thus was finally on the way toward resolution. With this change came a greater willingness by the European Allies to consider the strategy change on conventional defense that McNamara had originally advocated in 1962.

The nuclear sharing accord that emerged in the mid-1960s by no means was a perfectly satisfactory arrangement. But it did pass the important test of minimum acceptability to all partners (minus France), and it also provided room to grow in future years. It provided NATO a diverse nuclear posture capable of providing options along the ladder of escalation, thereby appealing to the protagonists for each rung. By the mid-1960s, NATO was well on the way to acquiring a large and diverse force of tactical nuclear weapons—tank artillery, atomic demolition munitions, tactical air bombs, short range missiles, and air defense weapons—that provided an impressive capability to wage a battlefield nuclear war. Since NATO's posture lacked medium/intermediate range missiles that the MLF would have provided, it was less impressively endowed with the capacity to strike deep, including into the Soviet Union. But the impending deployment of U.S. F-111 bombers, coupled with Britain's medium bombers, did provide a capacity to perform this mission at least to a limited extent. The ongoing U.S. deployment of ICBMs and SLBMs, and Britain's SLBM program, rounded out NATO's emerging posture with a strong strategic retaliatory force.

NATO was still a good distance removed from developing a common employment doctrine and war-fighting concepts. But it had reached agreement on release of U.S.-controlled nuclear warheads in a crisis, and it was beginning to develop coordinated contingency plans for employing them flexibly in a crisis. Also, it was well on the way to developing operational plans for employing its theater and strategic strike systems, plans that responded to both American and West European concerns. Many questions remained unanswered. But the establishment of the NPG provided an institutional vehicle for addressing them in a forum conducive to agreement and compromise. NATO's nuclear sharing debate was not over; as events were to show, it continued to bedevil the Alliance for many years, but it had been settled to the point where it no longer was dividing the Alliance to such a degree that progress on other, equally important issues, was impossible.



## VI. THE SEARCH FOR CONVENTIONAL SOLUTIONS

Although the conventional defense issue had slipped from public view as nuclear problems rose to predominance, a great deal had transpired behind the scenes since McNamara's Athens Speech. In the months immediately following, the Allies had turned a cold shoulder to McNamara's demand for stronger conventional defenses. By the time of the Ottawa meeting the following spring, however, they had begun to acknowledge that the idea had merit provided it did not become a vehicle for paring back the U.S. nuclear deterrent. Accordingly they agreed at Ottawa to commence an official review of NATO's strategy and requirements, including ways to make the best use of available resources to improve NATO's conventional posture.

McNamara and other U.S. officials set about to use this review, which became known as the "Force Planning Exercise," to press their case for reforming NATO's strategy along the lines discussed at Athens. Initially they made some headway. Part of the reason was that they conducted their campaign outside the glare of publicity, thus making possible a more profitable dialogue with the Allies. Operating within NATO's private councils during the summer and fall of 1963, they were able to begin persuading the Allies that the NATO-Warsaw Pact conventional balance was closer than previously had been appreciated. This had the effect of somewhat softening Allied hostility to a NATO conventional buildup.<sup>1</sup>

Equally important, 1963 saw important strides toward a growing consensus between the United States and West Germany on the role of conventional forces in NATO's military strategy. FRG Defense Minister Strauss's departure from office in late 1962, brought about by his involvement in a political scandal, had cleared the way for a more forthcoming West German stance on McNamara's ideas. The German Army, which had long been skeptical of NATO's dependence on tactical nuclear weapons for battlefield operations, took advantage of the opportunity to nudge Bonn in the direction of an accommodation with the United States. Senior Bundeswehr officers believed that a conventional buildup would help bolster NATO's ability to protect the FRG's forward areas, a key goal of the West German government. This attitude increasingly led Bonn to

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<sup>1</sup>See Stromseth's account of how the consensus-building process unfolded within NATO during these years, *The Origins of Flexible Response*.

look favorably on the idea of adopting a new NATO strategy midway between the two extremes, one that called for a combination of nuclear and conventional forces to achieve forward defense.

The FRG's growing emphasis on greater balance in NATO's posture did not mean that differences between the United States and West Germany had been entirely resolved. Disagreements still remained over such important issues as the nature of the threat, NATO's requirements, and sustainability goals. Moreover, at that time the nuclear sharing issue had not yet been resolved, which constrained Bonn's willingness to embrace conventional defense too wholeheartedly. But Bonn's new stance did mean that sufficient common ground now existed between the United States and West Germany to forge a workable blending of views.

As a result, in November 1963, the NATO Military Committee issued a new draft strategic appraisal, entitled MC 100/1, that seemed to lay the groundwork for adoption of a new NATO military strategy. MC 100/1 called for a forward strategy, rejected the trip-wire concept, and endorsed the principle of options at the conventional, tactical nuclear, and strategic levels. Included was a call for an initially restrained use of nuclear weapons should escalation become necessary. MC 100/1 recognized that NATO's options would depend upon the Alliance's success in erecting adequate forces for this purpose. Accordingly, it challenged NATO to make a serious effort to reduce its reliance on nuclear weapons for dealing with limited aggression by building better conventional defenses.

Had MC 100/1 been formally adopted, NATO might well have gone on to rewrite MC 14/2 as early as 1964 or 1965. Its progress, however, quickly ran into a serious roadblock when the document rose to NATO's political levels for approval. Although many other NATO Allies supported MC 100/1, the French, insisting that NATO should retain a trip-wire concept in which enemy aggression would be met by a total nuclear response, vetoed it. They also rejected a proposal to prepare two versions of MC 100/1: one reflecting their views and the other endorsing the Military Committee's draft. Refusing to participate in any exercise that prepared new NATO force goals in absence of agreement on basic strategy, they insisted that the matter be debated by the North Atlantic Council and, if necessary, by the chiefs of state.

Knowing that the French reaction came directly from de Gaulle and was not subject to change, the United States reacted to this rebuff by deciding to postpone a

formal strategy debate, thereby avoiding a showdown with Paris. It decided instead to use the Force Planning Exercise to focus on the concrete details of NATO's conventional force plans. As he led U.S. efforts in this area, McNamara was partly motivated by a desire to achieve greater management efficiency in the use of Alliance resources. But more important, he also hoped that by forging Alliance-wide agreement on the all-important programmatic details, he eventually could guide the Alliance into a de facto acceptance of a new military strategy itself.

Given stubborn French opposition even to this enterprise, McNamara's efforts initially encountered tough sledding. But from 1964 onward, progress gradually was made. The Force Planning Exercise steadily developed into a valuable mechanism for ironing out practical disagreements over NATO's defense programs and for reaching consensus on future requirements, improvements measures, and budgetary guidelines. It also served McNamara in his efforts to achieve better coordination among NATO's disparate programs, to prune away unessential weapons, to focus on realistic goals, and to establish priorities. As a result, the greater sense of efficiency and coalition planning that developed within NATO itself helped foster greater enthusiasm for taking conventional defense seriously.

Important changes were made in NATO's planning machinery during these years. Under McNamara's prodding, the ability of the NATO civilian and military staffs to develop coherent plans was strengthened, and the member nations were brought more intimately into the task of defining requirements, thereby helping ensure that they would be willing to pursue the programs that the Alliance was calling on them to execute. By 1966 NATO's machinery had started to acquire some of the sophistication of McNamara's Pentagon, including a formal planning process that used NATO's overall military requirements as a basis for providing guidance to the member nations on how to prepare their forces for the years ahead.

Equally important, the Force Planning Exercise came to give the NATO Allies a better understanding of the practical implications of McNamara's ideas. While a complete consensus was still well beyond the realm of possibility, differences on substantive issues had narrowed considerably since 1964. The Allies now had a more accurate understanding of the NATO-Warsaw Pact military balance, one suggesting that a viable conventional defense was not beyond NATO's reach. They also had a firm understanding of what stronger conventional defenses would cost and what returns on the

battlefield they would provide. Along with this, they had credible reassurances from Washington that a conventional buildup would not result in either the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Europe or the erosion of extended nuclear deterrence. This left most nations, minus France, in a more positive frame of mind for accepting at least partial steps in the strategy directions that McNamara was advocating.

### **SACEUR'S ROLE**

McNamara's success in persuading the Allies to come at least this far by 1966 was a product of more than his personal efforts. For example, McNamara received useful help from U.S. Army General Lyman Lemnitzer, the new SACEUR. Lemnitzer had succeeded Norstad in early 1963. No nuclear advocate, he was not inclined to push Norstad's plans for nuclear partnership and he maintained a neutral stance on the MLF debate. In general, he agreed with McNamara's strategic concepts. He believed that NATO should strive to strengthen its conventional forces while not sacrificing its nuclear deterrent, and he acted in this capacity during his tenure, which lasted until 1969.<sup>2</sup>

In doing so, Lemnitzer represented the opinions of the professional military from most NATO countries. For the most part, NATO's military officers still saw deterrence benefits in a strategy whose public rhetoric stressed nuclear escalation. But they did not share the faith that NATO's political leaders often placed in nuclear weapons as actual instruments of defense. This especially was the case for army officers. Air commanders were more prone to look with favor on nuclear weapons and the greater destructive capacity they provided to the tactical air forces. But ground commanders were more preoccupied with such practical problems as holding terrain and consequently believed that NATO required larger conventional forces rather than just nuclear firepower. As a result, the professional military provided an important source of support for a flexible military strategy and a stronger conventional defense during these turbulent years.

This congruence does not imply that Lemnitzer, SHAPE, and NATO military officers were close Allies of McNamara. Lemnitzer did not react favorably either to McNamara's efforts to downgrade NATO's assessment of the Warsaw Pact threat or to his increasingly sanguine views on the military balance. Lemnitzer's reaction partially stemmed from disagreements with McNamara on substantive grounds. In addition, he

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<sup>2</sup>See Jordan, *Generals in International Politics*, for details on Lemnitzer's role, Ch. 5, pp. 93-121.

worried that McNamara's rosy interpretation was providing West European nations a convenient rationale for cutting back on their conventional defense efforts. Lemnitzer also was concerned about the mounting frictions in U.S.-French relations and Washington's growing animosity toward de Gaulle. Although not an admirer of de Gaulle, he tried to moderate between the two sides, and this occasionally led him to distance himself from Washington.

Lemnitzer, however, was knowledgeable about the military details of what was required to improve NATO's defenses in Central Europe and found himself in agreement with McNamara's programmatic thrust. Believing that NATO's forces needed greater firepower and cross-country mobility, he favored procurement of more medium tanks, self-propelled artillery, and armored personnel carriers. He also found NATO's logistic capability lacking and pushed for improvements in it. In short, he was an advocate of modernization, mechanization, and greater staying power, steps needed to configure NATO's forces for armored warfare against the Soviets' tank columns.

Lemnitzer also was a political realist who believed that NATO's future plans should focus on what was realistically achievable. SHAPE studies in 1964 had concluded that in order to fund all desirable plans, NATO would have to spend at well beyond plausible levels. But these studies also concluded that NATO could remedy many of its deficiencies by pursuing a well-prioritized program costing substantially less. On political grounds, Lemnitzer was more attracted to the latter approach and favored its incorporation into NATO's planning. In this area, he and McNamara thought alike.

While Lemnitzer did not have McNamara's reputation for activism, he made intelligent use of his position to pursue his goals. In NATO's evolving defense planning process, SACEUR and SHAPE were responsible for interpreting ministerial guidance on military strategy and for coordinating NATO's efforts to define and establish agreed-upon requirements covering all member nations. They also were responsible for monitoring NATO's progress and reporting on it to the civilian ministers. This authority provided Lemnitzer important leverage for influencing not only NATO's planning goals but also specific programs being implemented by individual nations. He used it to advantage by channeling NATO and its member nations in the direction of a focused, balanced, and realistic conventional improvement effort. Partly as a result of his efforts, NATO's military forces in Central Europe slowly but steadily began moving in the directions that McNamara was urging. MC 14/2 officially remained in place, but the plans and programs required to lay the basis for a new strategy began to take shape.

Lemnitzer also encouraged this trend in other ways. During 1963-1965, he helped guide the formation of the ACE Mobile Force, a multinational unit of 5000 soldiers that together formed the equivalent of a large brigade and six air squadrons. Contributions were made by the United States, Britain, West Germany, Canada, Belgium, and Italy. The purpose of the ACE Mobile Force was to provide NATO an ability to react quickly to a crisis, particularly in Northern Norway and Turkey. While it was configured with nuclear weapons, its main purpose was to give NATO an early conventional option along the distant flank areas so vulnerable to the kind of limited Soviet incursion that McNamara and others feared. For parallel reasons, NATO in 1967 established a combined naval force under SACLANT. Named the "Standing Naval Force Atlantic" (STANAVFORLANT), this force was composed of destroyer class ships from several nations. Flying the NATO flag, its purpose was both to foster combined training in peacetime and to provide NATO maritime options in a crisis on the northern flank. A similar NATO force was later to be established in the Mediterranean in 1969.<sup>3</sup>

Lemnitzer also initiated the process of altering NATO's tactical military doctrine in the direction of flexible response and conventional defense. This trend started in 1963, especially in command post exercises (CPX), which tested operational concepts and command and control procedures. Gradually it spread to NATO's field training exercises (FTX), which involve field maneuvers by actual units. It became particularly noticeable in 1964, when NATO field exercises envisioned a first phase of fighting without immediate resort to nuclear weapons followed by a graduated process of escalation once the threshold had been crossed. The following year, the French refused to participate in the "FALLEX" exercise, which openly departed from MC 14/2 by testing flexible response. Notwithstanding Paris's standoffish attitude, SHAPE's conversion to a conventional defense doctrine was not complete as of the mid-1960s. Senior NATO officers still believed that the Soviets would overrun their forces rather quickly and that NATO's edge in tactical nuclear warheads provided a means for staving off defeat. Their tendency to rely heavily on tactical nuclear defense plans did not change until the mid-1970s after NATO's strategy had been altered and the Soviets had finally deployed a full panoply of tactical nuclear weapons to their own forces. But the

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<sup>3</sup>For more detail, see NATO Information Service, *NATO: Facts and Figures*, Brussels, Belgium, 1984.

changes instituted under Lemnitzer helped launch NATO on the long road to flexibility in this critically important area.<sup>4</sup>

## **TRENDS IN ALLIANCE POLITICS**

These efforts by McNamara, Lemnitzer, and others were aided by important changes in Allied politics. In London, Wilson's Labor government was less prone than its predecessor to criticizing McNamara's logic. On the negative side, the defense ministry was entangled with budgetary problems brought about by Britain's need to fund not only its traditionally large navy and the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR), but also the new Polaris submarine program. Partly for this reason, Defense Minister Denis Healey was unenthusiastic about a conventional buildup that was budgetarily infeasible and would further compound his problems. But he also acknowledged the dangers of relying too heavily on tactical nuclear weapons and favored a limited effort to improve NATO's conventional defenses at least in the early stages.

In Germany, politics had undergone an even greater transformation. In late 1963, Adenauer had resigned and was replaced by Ludwig Erhard of the CDU; Defense Minister Strauss was replaced by Kai-Uwe von Hassel. Less enamored with de Gaulle than Adenauer, both Erhard and von Hassel were oriented to maintaining close relations with Washington and were more receptive than their predecessors to McNamara's ideas. Like Strauss, von Hassel continued to insist that the purpose of NATO strategy must be deterrence rather than preparing to fight an actual war. But he did not openly question the American nuclear commitment and he acknowledged that in order to deter credibly, NATO's posture must be able to react to all levels of aggression with an appropriate military response. To Washington, this was a welcome breath of fresh air.

In late 1966, Erhard resigned and was replaced by Kurt-George Kiesinger, who headed a coalition government made up of the CDU and SPD. Gerhard Schroeder, a moderate, became defense minister and the SPD's Willy Brandt was named foreign minister. Shortly thereafter Brandt began launching his controversial Ostpolitik, which was aimed at improving relations with the Soviets and resolving disputes over Berlin and Germany's borders. At the same time, Brandt wanted to retain Germany's anchor in

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<sup>4</sup>See Schwartz, *NATO's Nuclear Dilemmas*; and Stromseth, *The Origins of Flexible Response*, for a discussion of French reactions to the introduction of flexible response concepts into NATO's military exercises in the 1960s.

NATO and to preserve close ties with Washington. As a result, he made important bows in Washington's direction by deemphasizing Bonn's earlier insistence on gaining greater control over NATO nuclear weapons, by showing a willingness to sign the non-proliferation treaty, and by adopting a receptive stance to some of McNamara's ideas. These policies all helped facilitate Washington's efforts to reform NATO's strategy.

Along with these political changes in 1963-1966 came an important evolution in official West German thinking about NATO's military doctrine that further narrowed the gap between Bonn and Washington on strategy reform. A particularly important development was SHAPE's announcement in September 1963 that NATO's first line of defense was being moved forward to the demarcation line dividing the FRG from the GDR and Czechoslovakia. With this change, which had been approved only grudgingly by Britain and France, NATO had now officially committed itself to a forward defense of all of the FRG's territory in ways that precluded an early resort to the fluid, mobile, retreat-oriented tactics of the 1950s. This shift was greeted enthusiastically in Bonn and led to a more relaxed stance on Washington's strategy agenda. The new concept meant that a greater emphasis on conventional defense and flexible response would not be purchased at the expense of forward defense, one of the FRG's most important security goals. As a result, it cleared the way to a more cooperative relationship between Bonn and Washington.

Essentially, the United States traded its endorsement of forward defense for the FRG's support of flexible response. While the new doctrine called for a strong defense effort at the inner German border, it did not mandate the use of nuclear weapons until Soviet forces had ruptured NATO's frontal positions and had advanced far enough to begin approaching the rear boundary of NATO's forward corps sectors. This concept placed the point of escalation somewhere in the vicinity of the Weser-Lech river line, the same line that had been the location of NATO's defense positions, and therefore the escalation trigger, under the old doctrine. As a result, flexibility was built into the new doctrine by allowing for tactical, localized loss of terrain before a nuclear response became necessary. Even in the worst of circumstances, NATO's forward defenses seemed likely to hold out for several days before being operationally breached. Thus Washington's emphasis on at least delaying escalation was not compromised by the forward defense doctrine.

The new doctrine left the United States beholden to the FRG to implement forward defense in ways consistent with the spirit of flexible response. But it also made



the Germans dependent on the Americans for the successful construction of a forward defense posture. Although the other West European Allies had finally relented to the FRG's insistent calls for a forward defense, they did so with reluctance and with no visible intention of increasing their force contributions to NATO. Since West Germany's force levels were frozen by the 1954 Paris Agreement and by budgetary realities, the FRG government was left with no other alternative but the United States as a source for the required force commitments. This dependence, in turn, gave Washington a certain amount of leverage over Bonn's policy decision. Out of this mutual dependence and mutual influence came the seeds of a growing partnership on NATO's future strategy.

The first signs of partnership began appearing in 1963 when the United States and the FRG initiated periodic exchanges on mutual defense matters. This process began with official meetings at the defense minister and chief of staff level but soon grew in scope and breadth. Eventually several joint study groups were created that brought American and German staff experts together in a forum encouraging detailed study and dialogue. One of the effects was to infuse the West German government with a host of operations research, analytical, and planning techniques that McNamara's Pentagon had developed. More important, the process encouraged the kind of detailed analysis that could not help but promote a convergence of views.

One of the most important issues addressed in these years was the feasibility of conventional defense in Central Europe. By late 1963, the two governments were able to announce that the gap in their threat estimates had been largely closed. Nonetheless, the Germans continued to insist that NATO's force levels were too low for a conventional forward defense. NATO's peacetime posture by this time was beginning to approach the 30-division level that had long been mandated by official force goals for a nuclear strategy. But the Germans now insisted that the new doctrine would require 35-40 divisions. Without more forces, Bonn maintained, a purely conventional response would be feasible only against a limited Soviet attack. Against full-scale aggression, the Germans argued, NATO would be compelled to resort early to small battlefield nuclear weapons followed promptly by rapid escalation, including widespread strikes against Warsaw Pact mobilization centers and axes of advance.

The American response to this stance called for a more lengthy conventional resistance at least until Soviet goals had become known, a process that was likely to require several days. With respect to NATO's force levels, the Americans did not refute

German estimates of requirements but did point out that additional U.S. reinforcements might arrive in time to make up the difference and that, in any event, a modest expansion of German and Allied reserve formations was not precluded by legal agreements, budgetary realities, or official force goals. The dialogue at this stage ended inconclusively, but favorably enough to nudge the Germans toward expanded conventional defense efforts. As evidence, Bonn agreed to bring the Bundeswehr up to authorized manpower levels, to equip its Army units equivalent to U.S. standards, and to modestly enlarge its Territorial Defense Forces (reserves).

During 1964–1965, the Bundeswehr staff conducted a series of defense studies on their own that were briefed to their American counterparts. These studies upgraded Bonn's earlier assessment of conventional defense prospects as long as NATO's force improvement efforts were accelerated along required lines. With respect to nuclear doctrine, the West Germans now were talking in terms of a ladder of escalation that would begin with conventional resistance at the border and then would escalate selectively. Their concepts envisioned the limited use of atomic demolition munitions, air defense weapons, and nuclear tube artillery to slow enemy attacks and channel them with the twin goals of reducing the loss of territory and sending a last deterrent warning to the Soviets. Only then would full-scale theaterwide nuclear operations commence, leading to a strategic nuclear exchange.

The U.S. response was mixed, with American Army officers expressing skepticism about the viability of even limited nuclear operations. In the end, the gap was not closed entirely, but it was narrowed enough to make collaborative action possible. Moreover, the issues that were left open were largely theoretical and inherently unresolvable in the first place. In essence, both sides increasingly had come to the conclusion that NATO's defense prospects depended heavily on whether the Warsaw Pact was executed efficiently, and whether NATO's forces themselves responded effectively. These were uncertainties about which forecasts could not be made because they were likely to be influenced not only by such physically measurable phenomena as buildup rates and force levels, but also by such intangibles as morale, training, and leadership.

In the event of a successful enemy attack against an ineffective NATO defense, the Alliance's posture seemed likely to crumble quite early. But in the case of a clumsy, poorly executed attack against a well-performed defense, NATO's prospects appeared

favorable. For this reason, neither early defeat nor a successful conventional campaign could be ruled out of NATO's planning framework. The risk of defeat compelled the Alliance to preserve a strong nuclear option, while the prospect of success created a powerful incentive to strengthen NATO's conventional posture wherever feasible. Together, both prospects provided the Americans and the Germans common ground for agreement on NATO's strategy and force goals.

This movement toward accord was to some degree marred by growing U.S.-German friction over balance of payments problems and German armaments procurement in the United States. In 1963 the FRG had agreed to continue purchasing U.S. military equipment and support systems to help offset U.S. defense expenditures in Germany. FRG purchase of U.S. F-104 fighters, naval frigates, and other systems had helped achieve this goal, but by 1966, U.S. balance of payment deficits were on the rise again and Vietnam's demands were exerting pressure on U.S. troop deployment in Europe. Growing U.S. pressure for greater German offset purchases at this juncture collided with an economy drive by Bonn to rationalize its defense spending. The result was a visible rise in tensions that left both governments increasingly questioning their contribution to each other's security. This problem demanded an early resolution. But aside from it, West Germany and the United States now found themselves closer on defense issues than at any time in the past four years.

Although these trends in U.S.-German relations were influential in expediting strategy reform, an equally important development, which had the effect of removing a formidable barrier to this step, was France's withdrawal from NATO's integrated military structure in March 1966. Although France remained in the Alliance itself, NATO's forces, headquarters, and logistic facilities in France were compelled to leave French soil. Meanwhile French forces were entirely removed from assignment under SACEUR's command. France's withdrawal complicated NATO's defense plans by removing, on paper, several divisions that were important to the conventional defense and by introducing a nuclear wild card into the strategy calculus. This dark cloud, however, contained a silver lining. De Gaulle had been a vocal critic of McNamara's ideas in 1962 and had not softened his stance since then. France's membership on NATO's key military and civilian committees had given him a powerful lever for blocking any strategy change that did not meet his pleasure. By withdrawing from NATO's military planning staffs, he largely deprived himself of this lever. He now was

better able to exert complete control over French military doctrine, and he exercised this authority by realigning French forces to execute an independent military strategy, but he was no longer able to prevent the Alliance from adopting a different strategy of its own.

The United States, albeit initially angered by de Gaulle's rebuff, promptly recovered its political bearings and set about to take advantage of the opportunity. During the spring of 1966, Washington began stepping up its efforts to lead NATO in the direction of stronger conventional defenses and strategy reform. Freed from its most persistent critic, it now found itself facing a more amenable set of Allies and a situation conducive to its policy goals. As events turned out, it was to be successful in 1967, and in a way that many found almost anticlimactic.

## VII. TOWARD A NEW NATO MILITARY STRATEGY

Coming in the wake of de Gaulle's withdrawal, the meeting of NATO's defense ministers in July 1966 was a more auspicious occasion than normal. In June, the North Atlantic Council (NAC) had met in ministerial session to make decisions on how NATO would immediately go about adjusting to France's withdrawal. The July session of defense ministers was devoted to long-range defense planning issues. There, McNamara adopted a positive, upbeat stance. He underscored the U.S. commitment to a forward defense of West Germany and said that France's withdrawal need not cripple the Alliance. He repeated his assertion that NATO's strategy required a strong conventional option and that the Soviet military threat was manageable. But he went on to say that NATO's defenses were deficient in many areas and that they needed strengthening.

The problem, he asserted, was not that the Alliance's overall defense effort was grossly inadequate but rather that NATO was not applying its resources efficiently enough. Also, he claimed, the United States was bearing too large a share of NATO's defense burdens and the Allies had to do more. To help solve both of these problems, he proposed a two-phased NATO-wide improvement effort. In the near term, he urged, NATO should pursue moderate measures aimed at strengthening the quality of its present M-day forces by improving airbases, buying larger war reserve stocks, and other measures. For the long term, he said, NATO should pursue plans to increase its mobilization capability and field larger reserve forces. The entire enterprise, he proposed, should cover a ten-year period.

At the end of the meeting, the ministers formally adopted new procedures, based on McNamara's management model in the Pentagon, for reviewing NATO's defense plans on a regular basis. The system they adopted called on NATO to develop a formal five-year plan that would identify both future force requirements and national programs to meet them. This plan was to be reviewed and updated regularly, thereby providing NATO a coherent basis for adjusting its military forces to evolving circumstances. The first plan, which was to draw on the NATO analytical review that had been underway since 1964, was to be formally approved the following year.

The results of this meeting helped raise NATO's spirits by conveying a sense of optimism and purpose. As the summer unfolded, however, events seemed to be leading

NATO in the opposite direction. British defense minister Denis Healey announced that the United Kingdom, facing a growing budget crunch, wanted to cut back the BAOR. Also, the Belgians announced a plan to cut two of their six brigades from the active army. Similar political rumbles were heard from Bonn. Compounding things was the Vietnam War, which was causing personnel turbulence in U.S. forces in Europe. In Washington, growing complaints about balance of payment problems and overall dissatisfaction with Allied defense efforts were leading influential Congressmen to begin questioning the U.S. military presence in Europe. To further muddy NATO's waters, the Warsaw Pact that year issued a formal call for detente in East-West relations, thereby raising additional questions in many Western circles about NATO's raison d'être.

U.S. officials grew worried that these negative trends might reinforce each other and bring about a downturn across the entire Alliance. To help prevent this, that fall President Johnson reached agreement with Prime Minister Wilson and Chancellor Erhard to embark upon a searching reappraisal of NATO's security agenda. In response, the NAC met again in December in ministerial session and agreed to undertake this study. The NAC called for a thorough analysis of East-West relations, inter-Allied relations, NATO's defense policy, and relations with other countries. This effort became known as the "Harmel Exercise," named after the Belgian Foreign Minister.

As 1966 came to an end, NATO thus was embroiled in formal reviews in two different but equally fundamental areas: broad security policy and future defense programs. It was in this context that McNamara and other U.S. leaders came to the conclusion that the time finally was appropriate to seek a change in NATO's military strategy itself. The events of the past year had reinforced their judgment that MC 14/2 had proven to be a mistake because it allowed the Allies not to take conventional defense preparedness seriously. Since strategy still lay at the heart of NATO's problems, they concluded, a new statement of purpose would be required to help turn the Alliance around and restore energy to its defense efforts.

The United States therefore drafted an internal proposal for a new NATO military strategy and shortly thereafter presented it to the Alliance as a replacement for MC 14/2. While the Allies did not agree entirely with the American draft, many were responsive to Washington's underlying concern. As a result, the Alliance responded by agreeing to undertake a third study to run in parallel with the other two, to entail a formal review of NATO's military strategy with the American proposal as a basis for discussion. This

effort was successfully conducted over the succeeding months by the NATO Military Committee. Its results started becoming manifest in May 1967, when the Military Committee draft was released and the Defense Planning Committee (DPC) issued new guidance to help shape preparation of NATO's upcoming force plan. The conclusion was reached at the landmark ministerial meeting of the NAC on December 12, 1967.

At this meeting, the ministers made three important decisions that were based on the results of NATO's three studies. First, they approved the Harmel Report, the final product of the Harmel Exercise. This report launched NATO on a dual-track policy course aimed at both pursuing detente with the Soviets and improving NATO's defenses. Second, the ministers formally endorsed NATO's first five-year defense plan, which laid out future directions for force improvement efforts through 1972. Third, they approved an entirely new "strategic concept" to replace MC 14/2. The document that they authorized bore the title "MC 14/3, Overall Strategic Concept for the Defence of the NATO Area." The strategy it contained was officially labeled "flexibility in response." Stated in more colloquial terms, the new strategy was one of "flexible response."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See *NATO: Facts and Figures* for a discussion of the Harmel Report and NATO's five-year defense plan.

## VIII. MC 14/3: CONTENTS

The strategy of flexible response can best be judged on the basis of its internal contents and its staying power rather than its shaky political origins. MC 14/3, a document heavily laced with internal compromises and unresolved ambiguities, was a product of a stressful transatlantic political struggle that frayed NATO's edges during the 1960s. But once it had been created, it slowly began to develop a life force of its own. This became increasingly clear over the following two decades. During these years, the strategy debates of the 1960s receded into the background and NATO's members increasingly began to embrace the guidelines that flexible response laid down. As a result, MC 14/3 steadily gained acceptance in Western Europe, acquired an independent stature, and began driving NATO's defense plans in the directions that its supporters originally had envisioned. In retrospect, what stands out is not MC 14/3's difficult birth and fledgling childhood, but rather its remarkably long, stable adulthood.

The reason MC 14/3 endured is that its roots were more deeply planted in military strategy and Alliance politics than was apparent at first glance. MC 14/3 reflected American thinking in many ways, especially by endorsing stronger conventional defenses. But it also included a number of changes mandated by the Allies, the main thrust of which was to preserve a strong role for nuclear deterrence. Because of these changes, MC 14/3 was not, as some critics have charged, a strategy that Washington had hammered down the throats of unwilling Allies. Even in 1967, the general reaction across Western Europe was one of broad, if not visibly enthusiastic, endorsement. This included West Germany and other nations that originally had been highly critical of McNamara's ideas. Although these nations were left harboring some reservations about flexible response, the seeds of acceptance were planted deeply enough in them to grow. In particular, within a decade West Germany emerged as one of MC 14/3's principal exponents, as did the United Kingdom.

While MC 14/3 was influenced heavily by U.S. and NATO analytical studies during 1961-1967, it also was a product of outright negotiation and bargaining that took place during its formal Alliance-wide coordination. As a result, it often has been characterized as being a strategy erected on a foundation of political compromises. This portrayal is accurate in the sense that MC 14/3 bore the stamp of no single nation nor a



preordained scheme of any single man, including McNamara. But to imply that MC 14/3 was an unintelligible strategy providing unusable guidelines for planning is wide of the mark.

The process by which MC 14/3 was forged undeniably was heavily political, but the compromise outcome, while not perfect by anyone's standard, was nonetheless coherent. Indeed, MC 14/3 turned out to be a rather insightful document, one that suggested careful strategic thought as well as compromise. This, at least, is how MC 14/3 is generally viewed in official NATO circles today. The reason is that MC 14/3 reflected a synthesis of views on both sides of the Atlantic and a balanced treatment of the multiple objectives that were being pursued, to varying degrees, by all Alliance members. MC 14/3 thus faced outward as well as inward, and it did more than merely preserve a facade of Alliance unity. We can best illustrate how this result was achieved by first reviewing how MC 14/3's architects went about addressing the new strategy's objectives and then by examining the contents of the strategy itself.<sup>1</sup>

NATO's members all agreed that the primary objective of the new strategy was to be deterrence of enemy attack on any member, territory, or vital interest in Western Europe. To the extent that controversy still existed in 1967, it was not over deterrence per se, but rather over the exact balance between nuclear and conventional forces that should be struck to achieve this goal. While the Allies had come to accept that some degree of conventional strength was required, they preferred to continue placing heavy reliance on nuclear weapons. The United States favored a greater, albeit not exclusive, reliance on conventional forces. The process of negotiation over MC 14/3 in this area focused on the search for a common ground between these two approaches.

The idea behind deterrence, then and now, is to persuade the enemy not to attack by means of making the stakes, risks, and costs of aggression far outweigh any rational calculus of potential gain. In MC 14/2's heyday, NATO had simply assumed that the very threat of nuclear reprisal, especially by U.S. strategic forces, was enough to achieve deterrence in virtually any circumstance. But since then, the United States had come to develop a more insightful realization of the subtleties of deterrence and the limitations of nuclear threats. It had concluded that to persuade an aggressor not to attack at a time when he might be desperately driven to do so, the deterrent threat must be credible.

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<sup>1</sup>See *NATO: Facts and Figures* for a discussion of the Harmel Report and NATO's five-year defense plan.

To McNamara, "credibility" meant that in a crisis the Soviets must unambiguously perceive that NATO possessed not only the physical capability to enforce the deterrent, but also the will to do so. The core problem with nuclear threats, he argued, was that they might not be credible against nonnuclear aggression because they would obligate NATO to run equally grave risks of its own. A purely nuclear strategy would require NATO not only to respond to an enemy nuclear attack but also to be willing to initiate nuclear war in the face of purely conventional aggression. This, in turn, meant that the Alliance would have to be politically capable of reaching an internal consensus to start a process of escalation that could culminate in the physical destruction of NATO's nations themselves.

In a crisis, McNamara and other U.S. officials reasoned, deterrence would hinge not on whether NATO actually could muster the will to execute its nuclear threats, but instead on how the Soviets appraised NATO's political will in advance. Doubtless, the Americans felt, the Soviets would not lightly dismiss NATO's stated intent to escalate, especially if it was backed up with adequate forces to do so. But whether this threat would absolutely inhibit them from engaging in risk-taking behavior, especially in *desperate circumstances, was a more difficult matter*. As the United States argued, there always would be a risk that the Soviets, sensing in advance the extreme reservations that NATO's leaders would face at the moment of truth, might discount NATO's threat. Put another way, the Soviets might conclude that the stakes in some future crisis might justify a decision to test NATO's resolve. This could be the case especially in a situation in which a successful war provided Soviet leaders an avenue to avoid some severe political setback, such as the crumbling of their East European empire or communist rule in the USSR itself.

Unfortunately, there was no reliable way to ascertain how the Soviets were thinking about the complex psychological dynamics of deterrence. Their publicly available strategy documents at the time suggested a proclivity to believe that any NATO-Warsaw Pact war quickly would become nuclear because of escalation by NATO. But elementary logic suggested that in an actual crisis, the Soviets would have no incentive to seek out a nuclear war if it was not thrust upon them. Further, their past behavior in Europe and elsewhere suggested that in a crisis they would be prudently careful, as well as clever enough to minimize the risks to themselves while maximizing the ambiguity facing NATO.

Moreover, the evidence from their military programs implied a complex view of war that went well beyond any exclusive preoccupation with nuclear weapons. During the 1960s the Soviets had embarked on an ambitious nuclear buildup. But they also had begun to equip their ground and tactical air forces, which previously had been structured primarily for nuclear war, with weapons that commonly are associated with conventional combat. This trend suggested that, their public rhetoric aside, the Soviets had reached a decision to be prepared for either nuclear or conventional war, without prejudging the outcome. It also implied that the Soviet government was willing to spend the vast sums required to be prepared quickly to prosecute a conventional war to completion if the need presented itself. Because decisions of this sort consume enormous national resources, they are seldom taken lightly. Normally, they reflect conscious, carefully planned intent. This certainly seemed to hold true for Soviet defense policy in the 1960s.

In the face of this emerging Soviet strategy and force posture, the United States was particularly concerned about limited contingencies and enemy "salami slice" tactics. There could be no doubt, Washington believed, that NATO would respond in kind to a nuclear attack and that it would risk nuclear escalation in any conventional war in which the West's political survival was openly at stake. But, the United States argued, what about an incident at sea or a probing attack on Norway or Turkey? Or for that matter, what about a large conventional attack in Central Europe with ambiguous origins? Or an attack advertised by Moscow as a product of "limited" and negotiable political goals? How would the United States respond to the prospect of NATO crossing the nuclear threshold in these situations? Indeed, how would the West European Allies themselves respond? Equally important, how would the Soviets assess the credibility of NATO's nuclear threats in these ambiguous circumstances?

To the United States, these question marks did not imply that nuclear weapons should be removed entirely from the deterrent equation. But they did suggest that NATO's deterrent strategy, especially for limited war, would have to be based on threats that were credible in the eyes of both NATO's capitals and Moscow. This requirement meant that NATO's posture would have to include forces that the Alliance could be relied upon actually to use in the full range of a crisis that might erupt. While the Soviets might doubt that NATO would employ nuclear forces in all contingencies, they would be unlikely to doubt NATO's willingness to meet limited aggression with a commensurate response. To the United States, unambiguously strong conventional forces were needed for this purpose.

These then were the U.S. arguments. For their part, the Allies were not prepared to concede that nuclear forces were unimportant to the deterrence of limited attacks. Nor were they enthusiastic about the kind of costly conventional buildup that would enable NATO to fight a war of unlimited duration, thereby suggesting that NATO would prefer to accept the conventional destruction of Western Europe rather than escalating. But they had come to grant that Washington's worries about nuclear credibility were valid. This led them to agree that a conventional buildup of moderate proportions made sense. While their specific positions differed somewhat from one nation to the next, they had in mind a posture that would give NATO a viable defense at least in the early stages and, if affordable, perhaps longer. Accordingly, they agreed to incorporate language to this effect in the new strategy.

A second objective guiding MC 14/3's formulation—defense—similarly pushed the new strategy in the direction of a stronger conventional posture. At first glance, the goal of "defense" seems synonymous with deterrence. But when the operational details are considered, it takes on a sufficiently different meaning to be treated as a separate entity in military planning. The main distinction here is that while "deterrence" focuses on how to shape the enemy's political decisions before combat begins, "defense" addresses how NATO actually should fight a war once it starts. In presuming that deterrence has failed, it is concerned with NATO's ability to physically prevail on the battlefield and to achieve its wartime ends. These ends in theory might include preventing the Soviets from seizing and holding territory, denying them other operational aims, and competing successfully in the grim attrition process that also drives combat. Plausibly they also could include war-termination aims, such as launching counterattacks against enemy forces and territory to gain bargaining leverage. Whatever the case, they were defined in practical political-military terms.

Deterrence can become identical with defense when the former is measured in terms of the latter. But normally the requirements of defense are regarded as being potentially larger than deterrence. Because deterrence is achieved by manipulating perceptions and risk-taking propensities, an enemy plausibly can be bluffed into exercising restraint by less than adequate forces. Deterrence thus requires sufficient forces to undermine the attacker's confidence of victory and to confront him with the expectation of high risks and costs. But defense requires sufficient forces to give the defender confidence in his ability to repel an attack physically, and to do so at acceptable

risks and costs. As a result, defense can be achieved only by forces that meet stern tests of sufficiency, tests that can be subjected to physical measurement by both alliances. According to traditional military planning standards, this goal is attained only when the defender's forces are sufficiently powerful to confidently execute specific military missions on the battlefield. This does not necessarily require the defender's forces to be as large as the attacker's posture. Because the defender often enjoys such classical advantages as knowledge of the terrain and prepared positions, to some degree he can afford to fight outnumbered. But the defense objective does require a posture that is physically large enough to cover the terrain it is defending and to execute a coherent military strategy. This tends to elevate force needs beyond the more limited requirements of deterrence.

A thorough understanding of how the defense objective could best be achieved led MC 14/3's drafters to reach negative conclusions about any exclusive reliance on nuclear forces. The United States was the first to arrive at this conclusion; many Allies initially had been reluctant even to address the troublesome issue of how NATO actually would defend itself. But as their strategic thinking matured, they gradually came to see merit in the U.S. position.

A key issue in NATO's deliberations was whether small NATO forces could rely on tactical and theater nuclear weapons to offset any deficiencies against a large Warsaw Pact attack (80-100 divisions). Nuclear weapons provided enormous firepower that, it originally was thought, could help make up the difference. But they suffered from the drawback that they could only inflict damage on enemy forces: They could not occupy space or seize key terrain features. Although they potentially could deny the enemy his battlefield objectives, they were often unable to help NATO pursue many of its own defensive aims. Beyond this, an equally important operational question loomed large, one that initially was perceived only by U.S. Army officers but eventually came to be recognized throughout NATO professional military circles: What would happen once the Soviets acquired a full panoply of tactical and theater nuclear weapons of their own?<sup>2</sup>

At the time, NATO had available over 7000 nuclear warheads in Europe. These warheads were distributed among a host of delivery systems, including nuclear artillery, short-range missiles, and tactical air bombs for deeper strikes in the enemy rear areas.

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<sup>2</sup>The following analysis is based on interview material, including extensive discussions with NATO planners on the contents of MC 14/3 and official interpretations of the strategy.

As a result, NATO enjoyed a definite lead over the Warsaw Pact in this area. The Soviets, however, were hardly unarmed. Already they had begun fielding a large number of high-yield FROG and SCUD missiles for battlefield use as well as an impressive theater bomber force for strikes against NATO's rear areas. With these systems, the Soviets were not able to conduct the highly discriminating battlefield strikes that NATO could mount, but they could conduct massive terrain-fire operations to blanket NATO's forces and installations with lethal blast and overpressure. This gave them a strong capability for a theaterwide nuclear blitzkrieg. Beyond this, the prospect loomed that within a few years, the Soviets were likely to acquire the tube artillery and tactical air bombs that would enable them to match NATO in battlefield nuclear operations as well.

NATO's new military strategy thus had to be designed on the principle of eventual nuclear parity on the European battlefield. In this context, careful analysis suggested that NATO could no longer afford to rely on its nuclear strength to offset its conventional disadvantage in Central Europe. In fact, precisely the opposite seemed to be the case. This disturbing conclusion derived partly from analysis of the dynamics of massing forces on the battlefield. During the 1950s, both sides had learned to disperse their ground forces to reduce their vulnerability. This meant that to gain destructive benefit from nuclear strikes, especially with the low yield tactical weapons that were coming to dominate its inventory, NATO needed to compel the Soviets to mass their forces in a limited area. But the only way to accomplish this goal was for NATO first to mass itself, thereby denying dispersed Soviet forces the ability to continue their advance against NATO's now firm defense positions. This step would expose NATO's forces to preemptive destruction by Soviet terrain-fire warheads before Soviet ground units themselves had become vulnerable. These nuclear fires would enable advancing Soviet units to rip large holes in NATO's defense line and then advance quickly through, without massing in ways that would expose them to destruction from NATO's strikes in return. As a result, nuclear weapons seemed to confer important operational advantages on the attacker, not the defender.

Also, nuclear weapons seemed to be the friend of the side with the larger, not smaller, ground forces. Even apart from the disadvantages of massing dynamics, nuclear weapons did not automatically promise to alter the critical exchange rate (the ratio of forces killed on both sides) in favor of the smaller force. As a result, they did not enable the defender to compensate for his lack of adequate size. Their main effect would

merely be to accelerate the lethal pace of attrition on the battlefield. At best, they promised to completely destroy all forces on both sides, while simultaneously devastating the surrounding West European countryside. At worst, they promised merely to speed up the war and hasten the outcome, thereby making things worse for NATO rather than better. NATO had strong reasons for slowing down the pace of combat to give its mobilization efforts time to take hold. The Warsaw Pact would benefit from a faster war by limiting NATO's reinforcement time. Consequently, NATO seemed to have an incentive for avoiding nuclear war, not fostering it.

These troublesome considerations led a growing number of U.S. and Allied planners to conclude that NATO no longer could turn to tactical and theater nuclear weapons as a military cure-all. Equally important, NATO's planners concluded that conventional and nuclear operations were not separate phenomena on the battlefield. An ineffective initial conventional defense by NATO seemed likely to render a later tactical nuclear defense more difficult. By contrast, a successful conventional phase seemed likely to make the nuclear phase a more manageable proposition. It promised to reduce the amount of enemy forces to be destroyed while preserving a larger number of defending forces to conduct the required nuclear strikes and capitalize on the results. For these reasons, NATO's planners increasingly came to the conclusion that tactical and theater nuclear weapons should not be viewed as a substitute for an adequate conventional posture. The inescapable conclusion was that large ground and air forces were needed for both conventional and nuclear war, or any combination of the two.

Consideration of MC 14/3's next objective—crisis stability and escalation control—led to further doubts about the efficacy of a largely nuclear strategy. Once again, the United States was the principal exponent of argumentation in this area, with the Allies eventually coming to agree—at least partially—with Washington's views. American analysis had suggested that escalation could best be controlled when the pace, tempo, and shocks of combat could be limited, and when the opposing sides both recognized firebreaks and plateaus. Nuclear warfare promised to erase all of these inhibitions. It seemed likely to accelerate the pace of combat beyond the political capacity of decisionmakers to control events; and once the main threshold—first use of nuclear weapons—had been crossed, it offered no obvious plateaus on which the escalatory process could readily be halted.

The task of designing credible operational concepts for employing tactical and theater nuclear weapons to NATO's advantage bedeviled Alliance planners, who were

chronically hard-pressed to develop attractive plans. There were plenty of alternatives to massive retaliation, all envisioning a more gradual escalation. Each offered a more discriminating way to wage nuclear war than massive retaliation and therefore needed to be incorporated into NATO's war plans. But given the Warsaw Pact's conventional superiority and its eventual achievement of equivalent nuclear options, none seemed obviously capable of enabling NATO to attain its political-military goals while controlling escalation, especially in absence of adequate conventional forces.

One concept for employing tactical nuclear weapons called simply for detonation of a single weapon: a symbolic "shot across the bow" that would convey a clear political message of NATO's determination without touching off escalation. This step promised to do the trick if the Soviets lacked the stomach for nuclear war. But it suffered from the drawback that the Soviets would have been unlikely to attack in the first place if they were unprepared to face risks of this magnitude. If the Soviets were determined to press on, a limited use by NATO, with little operational effect on the battlefield, was unlikely to suffice. Indeed, it might even be counterproductive by signalling a lack of resolve on NATO's part. In any event, it could easily be matched and it would not physically impede enemy forces from advancing against defeated NATO conventional forces.

If political persuasion failed to work, the only way to stop the enemy's advance was to detonate enough weapons to destroy the Warsaw Pact forces in question. This goal, however, could not be accomplished with a few weapons. For example, analysis suggested that destruction of a single enemy division could require detonation of enough nuclear weapons to destroy virtually all targets within 100 square miles, or an area about the size of a city. Destruction of an enemy tank army, normally the minimum needed for closing a breakthrough salient, would cause even larger damage to the surrounding countryside. Targeting of enemy assembly areas, stockpiles, transportation networks, and aircraft based in the rear areas promised to cause more damage still. Massive detonations of this magnitude hardly seemed an appropriate vehicle for controlling escalation or containing damage to the countryside.

Beyond this, the dynamics of a nuclear war in Europe seemed to lead quickly and inexorably to an uncontrollable upward spiral. The result easily could be Europe's total destruction, followed soon by an equally devastating U.S.-Soviet intercontinental exchange. This dangerous situation stemmed from the vulnerability of many nuclear delivery systems in Europe and the resultant hair-trigger nature of the force postures on



both sides. NATO and Warsaw Pact tactical air forces and associated bases were especially vulnerable. Ground and missile systems were better protected, but they still could be destroyed by either highly accurate nuclear fires (NATO's style) or by terrain fire weapons (the Soviet technique).

As a result, each side seemed to have a strong incentive to avoid starting a war and crossing the nuclear threshold in the first place. While this inhibition might help foster crisis stability, the incentives seemed to switch dramatically once the threshold had been crossed to the point where steady expansion seemed likely. Because of its superior command-control systems and its more discriminating warheads, NATO might well enjoy an advantage in purely tactical exchanges on the battlefield. But the Soviets, with their high yield warheads, seemed capable of offsetting this advantage by expanding the scope of nuclear operations to include terrain fire on the battlefield and deep strikes against NATO's rear areas. In this event, each side would face a powerful incentive to launch its nuclear forces first with a massive blow, rather than await a preemptive strike by the other. The worrisome dynamics of this exchange seemed likely to lead directly from targets on the battlefield into the deep rear areas, including the Soviet Union and then the United States.

Once the nuclear threshold had been crossed, a rapid theaterwide escalation seemed hard to avoid. This sobering danger reinforced the importance of trying to control escalation, but it undermined NATO's confidence that control could be easily accomplished. The best, perhaps only way to avoid nuclear destruction, many U.S. analysts concluded, was not to cross the nuclear threshold at all. This could be done only if NATO's conventional forces were adequate to fight the enemy on his own terms and thereby could place the onus of escalation on the shoulders of the aggressor who was trying to alter the status quo. The problem was that, given NATO's conventional deficiencies, the onus of escalation lay on NATO's shoulders, where it did not belong. As a result, the decision to escalate seemed likely to come not from the side that might be averse to risks because it was embarked on conquest, but from the side that was trying to protect truly vital interests and therefore would have little choice but to accept them. This did not augur well for the control of escalation.

Consideration of these four objectives thus drove the Alliance toward a greater emphasis on conventional forces. A fifth objective—arms control—posed no constraint to this strategy shift because NATO was not contemplating the massive conventional

buildup that, by posing an offensive threat, might provoke a legitimate offsetting response by the Warsaw Pact. Indeed, a NATO conventional buildup of purely defensive proportions seemed likely to aid the cause of arms control by giving the Soviets an incentive to negotiate. However, the final three objectives in NATO's decision calculus did exert an important inhibiting effect on how far NATO could go in this direction.

The first of these objectives, cost control, placed strong budgetary constraints on the extent to which NATO could embrace ambitious conventional defense planning goals. Earlier in NATO's history, the United States had led the Alliance in opposing any military strategy that NATO could not afford in budgetary terms. But now it was the West Europeans who did not want to sign onto a strategy that they could not afford or that their domestic constituencies would not support. The United States had come full circle and was now willing to endorse a new strategy that would drive national budgets upward by setting demanding expenditure targets in the coming years. But even Washington, then fighting a costly and increasingly unpopular war in Vietnam, was not blind to the realities of fiscal constraints and the limits they set on NATO's prospects in the near term. Both sides approached MC 14/3 with a recognition that strategy wears a dollar sign.

The final two objectives, Alliance unity and nonproliferation, placed political limits on the extent to which NATO could abandon nuclear deterrence even if budget cost was set aside entirely. For its part, the United States regarded a stronger NATO conventional posture as a condition for its willingness to continue providing extended U.S. nuclear deterrence coverage over Western Europe. Whether it would have sought a "no first use" doctrine, had this been politically possible, is an open question since American officials still valued the deterrent power of nuclear weapons. Regardless of how far the United States might have been willing to take NATO's new strategy, there was little doubt about where most Allies stood. Although most had accommodated themselves to the idea of stronger conventional forces, nearly all remained adamantly opposed to any strategy that might completely remove nuclear weapons, and the threat of American nuclear retaliation, from the deterrence of nonnuclear attack.

Their position partly stemmed from lingering skepticism that conventional defense was feasible. McNamara had made major inroads in challenging the assumption that the Warsaw Pact was too superior to be overtaken by a determined Alliance. But he had not

been so convincing that the Allies were completely willing to discard nuclear weapons. Allied military authorities were well aware that no feasible NATO conventional posture could possibly be made impregnable. Indeed, even if NATO somehow were to build larger conventional forces than the Warsaw Pact, some degree of risk still would exist that NATO might lose in a war. History showed plenty of examples in which an ostensibly weaker attacker had defeated a more powerful defender. Many Allied officers believed that even after a successful conventional buildup, nuclear weapons would be needed to hedge against whatever risks remained. U.S. authorities were hard pressed to dispute this conclusion.

An equally strong and fundamental reason for the Allies' stance was their continued belief that the coupling of American nuclear power to Western Europe's defenses was still a singularly important factor in deterring aggression of all kinds. In this respect, McNamara's arguments had not dissuaded the Allies from their earlier thinking. As a result, the West Germans and others were willing to cooperate with the Americans as long as efforts to improve NATO's conventional forces were not accompanied by parallel moves to peel away the nuclear deterrent. To them, any move beyond this critical threshold was unacceptable. The implications for Alliance unity and nonproliferation were as negative as they were obvious.

Had MC 14/3 embraced a "no first use" stance, the West German government in particular would have been in a politically difficult position. Since the British and the French had their own nuclear forces, they were not entirely dependent on NATO and the United States for deterrent coverage. But the West Germans, who were more exposed to invasion than either of these nations, lacked this advantage. In 1954, they had signed the Treaty of Paris, in which they had pledged not to acquire their own nuclear weapons. Then in 1967, they had acquiesced to U.S. and Alliance pressures to sign onto the nonproliferation treaty, negotiations on which were nearing completion at the time of MC 14/3's adoption. Through NATO's cooperative programs, they had acquired a limited form of access to nuclear weapons: the vehicles to deliver them. But the United States retained the actual warheads under its control, and even the FRG's delivery systems lacked the range for anything more than tactical use. In essence, West Germany was not an independent nuclear power and had no early prospect of becoming one.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Enthoven and Smith's book *How Much is Enough?* contains a good discussion of the constraints on NATO's use of tactical nuclear weapons.

By forswearing nuclear weapons in these two treaties, the FRG had placed its fate in NATO's hands. Both of these treaties were controversial in West Germany, not only because of their military implications but also because they seemed to single the FRG out as a nation that could not be trusted to possess what other nations, including the Soviet Union, already owned. A new NATO strategy that reserved U.S. and NATO nuclear weapons for use only in nuclear contingencies would have compounded the FRG's already-stressful security dilemmas. In particular, it would have left the FRG vulnerable to conventional invasion, with only NATO's questionable conventional forces to deter and defend. Political pressures probably would have built within the FRG either to disavow the new strategy, or to withdraw from the two treaties, or both. This step, in turn, would have severely strained the Alliance's cohesion at a time when it already seemed fragile enough.

The United States showed a sensitivity to this political reality and the limits it placed on the new strategy. Washington recognized that its agreement to continue providing extended nuclear deterrence against all contingencies was the price it had to pay for a West European commitment to build a stronger conventional posture. At the same time, recognition of political realities proved to be an important factor in West European capitals as well. As a practical matter, support for enhanced emphasis on conventional defense was the price that they had to pay to solidify the U.S. commitment to extended nuclear deterrence. A natural exchange thus suggested itself. This situation, the shared consensus NATO had reached on strategy, and the need to preserve unity all worked to lead both sides to forge a mutually satisfying bargain. The essence of this bargain was an Alliance-wide agreement to supplement continued extended nuclear deterrence with a larger role for conventional defenses.

The title of "flexibility in response" aptly characterizes how MC 14/3, and the more detailed planning documents that later flowed from it (e.g. MC 48/3 and subsequent official force goals), transformed this transatlantic accord into a militarily sensible strategy. First, in clear and distinct language MC 14/3 committed NATO to a forward defense. As was discussed earlier, Allied military authorities in 1963 had begun moving NATO's defense line to the inter-German border. Although this forward defense concept was interpreted in flexible terms, its adoption unmistakably signalled that NATO's forces now intended to engage in a much more serious effort to protect all of West Germany. MC 14/3 officially and irreversibly endorsed this important change. In

doing so, it ratified West Germany's need for an Alliance-wide defense not only of all its territory but also of its major cities and towns in the border area.

The same goal applied to exposed border regions in Norway, Turkey, and other nations. Although NATO's strategy debates of the 1960s largely focused on the Central Region, the northern and southern flanks were important considerations in MC 14/3's adoption. Indeed, some analysts believed that the Soviets were more likely to launch a probing attack in one of these areas than in Central Europe, where NATO's forces and the vital interests of the Alliance's most powerful members were concentrated. Northern Norway in particular seemed exposed to a Soviet strike. In the south, Turkish Thrace, which guarded the Dardanelles and the Turkish Straits, also seemed vulnerable to a quick Warsaw Pact attack. MC 14/3 signalled that NATO fully intended to defend these areas and was not prepared to sacrifice them to Soviet salami tactics.

Within the framework of forward defense, MC 14/3 created a strategic concept based on three mutually supporting tiers of combined military operations: direct defense, deliberate escalation, and general nuclear response. "Direct defense" was defined as a military effort aimed at physically blocking the enemy's advance and destroying his forces. Although it conceivably could be undertaken by nuclear weapons, it was characterized principally in conventional terms. "Deliberate escalation" was defined as an operation aimed primarily at influencing the enemy's political will to continue his aggression. Although escalation in theory could be undertaken by conventional forces (e.g. by naval attacks on the Soviet coastline), it primarily was the province of NATO's nuclear forces. "General nuclear response," the final stage, was defined in terms of a large-scale nuclear campaign aimed at destroying enemy strategic targets, including in the Soviet homeland.

To implement this strategic concept, MC 14/3 levied a requirement for a NATO force posture composed of a "triad" of capabilities. This triad was to include strong conventional forces that primarily would conduct the direct defense. Backing up the conventional leg were to be tactical and theater nuclear forces that principally would provide the means for deliberate escalation, and strategic nuclear forces that would carry out the general nuclear response. Each leg of this triad, it is noteworthy, was to be independently powerful enough to execute the military mission entrusted to it. While MC 14/3 recognized that its nuclear and conventional forces were interdependent, it rejected the notion that strength in one leg could compensate for weakness in another. In

this respect, it departed from MC 14/2, which overtly relied on nuclear strength to offset conventional weakness. MC 14/3 recognized no such notion of substitutability.

MC 14/3 thus aimed for a broad spectrum of military capabilities for pursuing NATO's multiple objectives. It anchored itself on the assumption that NATO required not only a strong defense posture, but a balanced one as well. In doing so, it rejected arguments that deterrence could be enhanced by purposefully leaving NATO's forces weak in some areas. It postulated that weakness in any area would suggest a lack of determination that might carry over to a crisis, and thereby would undermine deterrence. It concluded that NATO could best signal resolve by fully attending to its defense needs in peacetime rather than by leaving itself bereft of intelligent choices in wartime. MC 14/3 therefore sought to enhance deterrence not by foreclosing NATO's military options but by enlarging them as much as possible. It aimed to provide NATO the capability to block any enemy avenue of exploitation with a commensurate response, one that credibly would be executable by not requiring unwarranted escalation. It thus embraced the idea that a strong, across-the-board military posture increases deterrence, not weakens it.<sup>4</sup>

MC 14/3 carefully preserved NATO's flexibility to respond to aggression with whatever forces and operations it believed appropriate to the occasion. This meant that in an actual crisis, Alliance leaders were free to choose from the menu of options at their disposal. Depending upon the exact nature of the crisis, the strategy allowed them to react quickly or in a measured way, to expand or contract the scope of defensive operations, and to escalate or deescalate. MC 14/3 rejected the notion of a prepared military script that would be applied rigidly regardless of the provocation. By leaving everything open, it foreclosed nothing and thereby intentionally confronted the Soviets with a large dose of ambiguity.

Within the context of this flexibility, MC 14/3 laid out, for planning purposes, a broad concept of military operations that differed dramatically from MC 14/2. Of special importance was that MC 14/3 acknowledged the possibility of a limited NATO-Warsaw Pact war. It recognized that the Soviets might attack with limited aims in mind and with limited nonnuclear forces. For example, a small Soviet incursion against Norway or Turkey would be a limited attack. MC 14/3 called on NATO to react to aggression of this sort with a limited response of its own. This meant that NATO should tailor its use

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<sup>4</sup>For a critical discussion of FRG reactions to the no first use concept, see Karl Kaiser, Georg Leber, Alois Mertes, and Franz-Josef Schulze, "Nuclear Weapons and the Preservation of Peace," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 60, No. 5, Summer 1982.

military force to the situation and to its goals and interests at stake. In particular, MC 14/3 said, NATO should aspire to contain the aggression by applying NATO's military power in limited ways, consistent with Alliance wartime goals that sought to control escalation. NATO's goal in a limited war, it mandated, was to end the crisis on acceptable terms, not to physically destroy the Soviet Union, especially if that meant NATO's destruction in return.

MC 14/3's emphasis on a flexible response applied even to the contingency of a major Warsaw Pact conventional attack in Central Europe. Against this threat, MC 14/2 had envisioned a brief period of conventional defense followed by a rapid nuclear escalation, culminating quickly in strategic nuclear bombardment of the Soviet Union. By contrast, MC 14/3 called for a longer and more important period of conventional "direct" defense (duration unspecified) aimed at containing an enemy attack as far forward as practicable for as long as feasible. MC 14/3 went on to say that nuclear escalation was to be avoided if at all possible. It did not, as some writers have implied, intentionally create a trail of powder designed to lead inevitably to a keg of nuclear dynamite. It recognized that the firebreak between conventional and nuclear war was strategically important and should not be crossed unless NATO had no alternative. Therefore, it called for escalation to be undertaken only in the event of an impending collapse of the direct defense. By this was meant an immediate threat to the physical survival of one of NATO's members or a situation in which NATO's forward defenses had deteriorated to the point where no conventional options were available to shore up the situation.

In the event of an irreversible downturn, MC 14/3 reserved the right for NATO to be the first to cross the nuclear threshold. Indeed, it actively called on the Alliance to take this step if it was required to protect NATO's vital interests, and to take it before NATO's conventional defenses had been entirely defeated. But MC 14/3 also called for a truly "deliberate" escalation. By this it meant not a spasmodic response but instead a carefully calibrated escalation that would remain under positive, high-level control and would be attuned to the political-military dynamics of the specific crisis. This implied steady progression aimed first at halting the war by political means and only later to include major tactical and theater strikes to destroy enemy forces. The final step, a nuclear attack on the USSR itself, was to be undertaken as an outgrowth of this deliberate escalation and preferably as a last resort. It too was not automatically to be the

sort of city-busting attack that would invite a countercity retaliation by the Soviets. Its primary goal was to be the cessation of fighting on acceptable terms.

With respect to operational doctrine for the conventional defense, MC 14/3 implicitly ruled out any notion of large-scale retrograde tactics aimed at trading space for time. By demanding a firm forward defense rather than an elastic mobile one, it denied NATO commanders the classical maneuver by which military officers try to compensate for inadequate forces. To execute this demanding plan, MC 14/3 (and its subsidiary documents) called for an active-duty, deployed, immediately available posture capable of stopping a limited "short warning" attack in its tracks. This posture, MC 14/3 intended, would deter any Soviet attempt to seize a limited portion of West Germany in a surprise assault with those Warsaw Pact forces that were in the immediate vicinity of the inter-German border. In this event the Soviets, even to conduct a limited attack, would be compelled to mobilize a very large posture with reinforcements drawn from the USSR. This reinforcement effort, in turn, would provide NATO unambiguous warning and time to mobilize itself. Above all, it would give NATO time to establish defensive positions, to prepare the terrain, and to deploy reinforcements from the United States. The net result would be a larger, better prepared NATO posture, one that could not easily be dislodged, especially short of a massive assault with an 80-100 division Warsaw Pact posture consciously sized for a full theater offensive campaign.

Against the large, sustained attack that the Warsaw Pact could launch after fully mobilizing, MC 14/3 called on NATO to build a powerful mobilizable posture of its own, one based on a combination of active and reserve forces. Ideally, it specified, NATO's forces should be strong enough to contain this attack in the forward areas and ultimately launch counterattacks to restore any lost territory. It was the intention of MC 14/3 that such a posture would reduce or eliminate any need for NATO to be the first to cross the nuclear threshold.

MC 14/3 also was realistic. It recognized that this ideal standard was beyond immediate reach, and could be attained (if at all) only over the course of several years of sustained improvement efforts. Accordingly, MC 14/3 also specified a minimum requirement for NATO's posture that was to be attained as quickly as possible. It called on NATO's members to deploy enough forces to conduct an "initial" forward defense, one that could hold temporarily. While MC 14/3 did not attach a precise definition to the term "initial," most authorities had in mind a period lasting at least one week and



preferably a full month. Militarily, MC 14/3 contended, this initial defense was aimed at denying the Soviets confidence in a quick victory. But it also was intended to perform an important political function. By providing the time needed to clarify any ambiguity about the origins and nature of the war, it aimed at creating the political conditions necessary for NATO to make the decision to escalate.

MC 14/3 faced up to the likelihood that even a well-prepared initial defense might be worn down, driven back, and faced with defeat. Unless otherwise checked, the Warsaw Pact then would be left free to drive deep into West Germany and to reach the Rhine River or beyond. MC 14/3 concluded that while this conventional defense would complicate Soviet plans, alone it would not deter them if they were willing to pay for success. MC 14/3 therefore continued to rely on nuclear escalation for this purpose. It called on the nuclear forces to provide the extra, still important increment of required deterrent power that the conventional forces lacked.

At the same time, MC 14/3 also recognized that NATO might find the decision to escalate difficult if the conventional defense did not perform its task of providing adequate time and clarity. It thus viewed conventional strength as an important contributor to nuclear deterrence, not an irrelevant adjunct or, as some claimed, a detractor from it. Beyond this, MC 14/3 called on the conventional and nuclear forces to provide each other support in other, operationally complex ways. By keeping the Soviets uncertain about NATO's nuclear plans, its intention was to compel them to disperse their forces during conventional fighting, thereby inhibiting them from concentrating in ways needed to defeat NATO. Similarly, it called on the conventional forces to aid the nuclear forces by inflicting as many losses on the enemy as possible, thus easing the task of conducting nuclear strikes by thinning out the enemy's air defenses, by reducing the number of ground targets to be destroyed, and by eroding the enemy's ability to retaliate. In these ways, MC 14/3 tried to achieve deterrence through the combined effects of conventional and nuclear forces, rather than one or the other alone.

## IX. MC 14/3: IMPLICATIONS

MC 14/3's adoption marked the end of a long and remarkable odyssey that had begun with an American effort six years earlier to forge a revolution in U.S. and NATO's military thinking. It passed through a period of Alliance debate on nuclear sharing and control that ultimately led to an accord on this issue. Finally this odyssey culminated in an Alliance-wide agreement on a new strategy that preserved unity by reflecting a synthesis of views on both sides of the Atlantic. Such an achievement had once seemed beyond the realm of possibility. To be sure, the process of reaching it had been turbulent, but in this case the end justified the means. The new strategy would have been beyond reach had NATO not gone through a soul-searching debate on its priorities.

MC 14/3's adoption, it should be remembered, coincided with a parallel NATO effort to update and broaden its overall security policy in Europe. The Harmel Report, also adopted in 1967, shifted NATO's policy away from its earlier preoccupation with managing the Cold War and toward the pursuit of detente with the Soviet Union. The goal was to promote a constructive dialogue with the Soviets aimed at relaxing East-West tensions, while not prematurely letting down the West's defense guard. MC 14/3 thus was one part of a larger Alliance effort to overcome some of the Cold War's rigidities. It aimed at making NATO's military strategy more flexible, while the Harmel Report aspired to make the West's diplomacy more flexible. The two efforts worked together on behalf of a common enterprise.

While the transatlantic bargain that underlay MC 14/3 reflected Alliance political imperatives, it also resulted in a strategy that made better military sense than MC 14/3's critics often have alleged. Bargains arrived at by a coalition of nations typically fail in this area. Most often, they wind up reflecting the coalition's internal political dynamics and, in the process, do violence to such external standards as effectiveness and rationality. MC 14/3, however, met these standards to a considerable degree. This outcome partly reflected the division in the transatlantic debate over strategy along lines that lent themselves to a coherent solution. But it was by no means guaranteed at the outset.

One reason for this outcome was that MC 14/3's authors worked hard at intelligently blending together the arguments that were being made on both sides of the

Atlantic. NATO's leaders went to lengths to ensure that the new strategy was fully coordinated among the key headquarters and national capitals. The coordination process itself was conducted by American and Allied staffs aware of both their own interests and the need to work together. Moreover, these staffs displayed a willingness to study the issues in enough detail to probe below surface disagreements, to discover common ground, and to craft mutually satisfactory language. MC 14/3 thus was a hard-won product of coalition planning and management.

In the end, MC 14/3 was a product of both politics and analysis. In light of the conflicting perspectives that had prevailed at the onset, MC 14/3 would not have been adopted had the United States not applied the full weight of its leadership backed up by its nuclear strength. In this sense, politics dominated in the way that it must drive any Alliance-wide effort to make innovations in policy, strategy, and forces. At the same time, the United States did not have the political power to compel the Allies to act against their better judgment. It had to persuade them to see things differently and to change their minds. For this purpose, it had no choice but to resort to analysis and argument, which it did with skill. Fortunately the Allies reacted in a far-sighted way by agreeing to engage the United States on these terms and to let the results influence the final product. In this sense, analysis, not politics, was the father of MC 14/3.

In many ways, MC 14/3 was a product of cooperative efforts between the United States and West Germany. It represented the kind of balanced strategy that these nations, with varying degrees of emphasis, had come to favor. Although it left France outside NATO's military orbit, it certainly helped cement U.S.-German relations and marked the further emergence of the Washington-Bonn axis as one of NATO's strongest foundations. MC 14/3 also reflected the professional judgments and preferences of NATO's military leaders, who had come to doubt a purely nuclear strategy before most of their political leaders had seen the light. This gave MC 14/3 an important source of support and doubtless is partly responsible for the resiliency that MC 14/3 has shown in the years since 1967.

To be sure, MC 14/3, a compromise strategy, did not resolve all controversies or satisfy all military theorists. Among the least serious of its problems was that it was quite complex. It lacked the transparency that only simplicity can provide. As a result, it came across as confusing to laymen, and even seasoned professionals often found it hard to absorb at first exposure. A more serious drawback was that while MC 14/3 assigned

the conventional defenses a larger role in deterrence than before, it did not define precisely where reliance on conventional forces now was to leave off and nuclear weapons were to take over. By failing to resolve lingering ambiguity on this important issue, it left open to interpretation exactly how NATO was to distribute responsibility among the three legs of its triad. This proved to be a source of continuing controversy in later years with both the United States and the West European Allies citing MC 14/3 as justification for somewhat incompatible positions on this subject. In general, the United States favored a greater reliance on conventional forces and the Allies, less. MC 14/3 unfortunately provided no authoritative basis for resolving this important dispute.

Also, MC 14/3's call for forward defense undermined, to some degree, its emphasis on flexible response and the goal of controlling escalation. The concept of defending all of West Germany's forward areas denied NATO's military commanders, at least in theory, the option of retreating rather than resorting to tactical nuclear weapons. Moreover, forward defense—as implemented by a frontal array that left NATO lacking sizable reserves—increased the likelihood that escalation (to contain breakthroughs) could come early. For understandable reasons, this situation left the U.S. government, which particularly championed flexible response, uneasy.

In a similar vein, MC 14/3's emphasis on flexible response left West Germany's nerves somewhat strained. For Bonn, a core problem was that flexible response seemed to make escalation conditional upon NATO's reading of the situation at hand. In theory, MC 14/3's call for forward defense implied that escalation would be forthcoming once NATO's frontal positions had been breached. But MC 14/3's endorsement of flexible response plausibly left the Alliance an escape clause for other alternatives, particularly a theaterwide retreat, if the forward positions began buckling. To the United States and other Alliance members, an abandonment of forward defense might represent only a regrettable tactical expedient. But to the West Germans, it would amount to a strategic catastrophe of the sort that would invalidate the FRG's rationale for being in the Alliance in the first place. MC 14/3's ambiguity in this area stemmed less from its failure to stress forward defense than from its inability to prevent NATO from adopting other expedients in a crisis. Regardless, it left a question mark in the back of many German minds.

To an important degree, the balance that MC 14/3 struck between forward defense and flexible response was politically unavoidable. While the United States demanded flexible response as its condition for endorsing forward defense, the FRG demanded

forward defense as its price for signing onto flexible response. As a result, neither nation was able to have its cake and eat it too. Both sides reacted to MC 14/3's ambiguity with political maturity born not only of their awareness that compromise was required to upgrade the common interest but also of their realization that the Alliance's behavior could not be predicted. For example, it was not implausible that, in an actual war, the United States might be both more insistent on forward defense and more ready to escalate than the FRG or other West European nations. NATO thus needed to keep its options open, something that all participants recognized. Nonetheless, MC 14/3's ambiguity left both sides uncomfortable with this aspect of the new strategy.

Nor did MC 14/3 resolve all disputes over how nuclear escalation, once undertaken, should be conducted. The United States remained committed to a step-by-step escalation, with its emphasis on a steady, controlled upward progression that could be halted before an intercontinental war occurred. The Allies continued to display a hostile stance to the idea of a purely theater nuclear campaign that could leave Europe devastated and the United States and the Soviet Union relatively unscathed. Their underlying goal was still the coupling of the U.S. strategic arsenal to Europe, which they wanted implemented by a very rapid NATO escalation from conventional defense to a symbolic nuclear shot across the bow, to a full-scale strike against the USSR. Indeed, in their fondest dreams some Allies doubtless hoped that the nuclear war might be conducted over their heads and that Europe somehow could be insulated from its devastating effects. Their realistic expectations, of course, were more sober. But even in the clear light of day, MC 14/3's call for deliberate escalation left them worried and uncertain on this score. For entirely different reasons, deriving from concern that deliberate escalation might prove a chimera, the United States felt likewise.

In essence, notwithstanding prolonged debate on this subject, the Alliance still had not yet resolved exactly how nuclear escalation was to be conducted once the proverbial shot across the bow had been taken and had failed. Was the Alliance then to conduct only limited nuclear operations aimed at containing the enemy breakthrough? Or was it quickly to escalate to a theater nuclear campaign aimed at breaking the back of the enemy's force posture? Or was it promptly to conduct attacks against the Soviet homeland? If the strategy called for a steady progression from one step to the next, exactly how fast and under precisely what conditions should it proceed? The need to control escalation argued for restraint, military exigencies argued for nuclear operations

timed to enemy force dynamics, and the goal of exerting major political pressure on the Soviets to desist called for strikes on Soviet soil. MC 14/3 did not definitively sort out NATO's priorities in this area. Indeed, any firm statement of priorities was beyond the reach of analysis owing to the impossibility of forecasting the precise situation. For this reason, MC 14/3's call for flexibility was probably the wisest choice. But by leaving the issue open, MC 14/3 helped contribute to continued debate in future years.

Additionally, MC 14/3 left the important matter of NATO's conventional defense plans unresolved and subject to a wide range of interpretation. The United States clearly favored stronger Allied efforts and a sustained conventional buildup, even at a greater budgetary cost than West European governments were prepared to support. To the United States, MC 14/3 endorsed this vision. By contrast, many Allied nations found in MC 14/3 a plausible rationale for doing little more. The issue here was largely one of how much staying power NATO's conventional defenses should provide. McNamara had called for a 90-day logistic stock for NATO, while most Allies were inclined to support only a 30-day stockpile or less. Since MC 14/3 was not definitive on NATO's sustainment goals, this issue also was to result in stressful Alliance-wide debates in the following years.<sup>1</sup>

For all these reasons, one of MC 14/3's principal strengths—its ambiguity—was also its primary liability. Because it emphasized flexibility, it completely ruled out the predilections of a few. It left all Alliance members with the sense that their vital interests were at least minimally protected. At the same time, MC 14/3 absolutely guaranteed the wishes of no single nation. All participants were left with lingering worry that the strategy, in some situations, might result in their own undoing. In important ways, then, MC 14/3 was a "satisficing" strategy rather than an "optimizing" one: It accomplished its aims adequately but far from perfectly.

Military strategies, however, are seldom gauged by standards of perfection. What matters more is whether they prevent catastrophe, whether they allow nations and Alliances to cope with unsolvable problems, and whether a better alternative exists. If a better option was available in 1967, MC 14/3's authors were unable to identify it, and it

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<sup>1</sup>The distinction between planning concepts and actual practice in a crisis is an important one. MC 14/3 and its subsidiary NATO documents established operational concepts for sizing, designing, and programming NATO's forces to prepare them for use in a crisis. However, the issue of how they actually would be employed was left to be determined by NATO officials and Allies in the actual situation. Thus NATO retained the flexibility to escalate in a graduated manner or in different ways.

has not been identified since then. The simple fact is that the Alliance faced a compelling need to reconcile multiple objectives, many of which pulled in different directions. Other strategies could have done a better job of supporting one or another of these objectives, but MC 14/3 did the best job of balancing them. It may have fully achieved few, but neither did it unacceptably sacrifice any of them.

Beyond doubt, MC 14/3 placed NATO on a higher strategic plateau than before. Although not transparent to the public, it was a sophisticated strategy that responded intelligently to the era of mutual nuclear deterrence that the Alliance was facing in the years ahead. As a result, it represented a decided improvement over the strategy it replaced, which had outlived its usefulness. MC 14/2 had emphasized deterrence and cost control while attaching little importance to other objectives, and it had bet imprudently on the power of nuclear weapons. MC 14/3 erected a considerably better deterrent, one that was anchored on forces and threats that would be credible in Moscow even after the Soviets had attained nuclear parity. It also paid attention to NATO's need to be prepared to actually fight a war in Europe and to control escalation.

For these reasons, it provided a solid foundation for maintaining Alliance unity, one that could endure in the years ahead. It offered both the flexibility that the United States wanted and the nuclear insurance that the Allies insisted upon. By fashioning a strategy that helped improve NATO's collective security in the eyes of all members, it passed the twin tests of consensus and coherence not only minimally but impressively. Equally important, it gave NATO's leaders an important instrument in their battle to halt further erosion in the Alliance's defenses. It did not forestall all of the military cutbacks that were being contemplated in the late 1960s, but it enabled the United States to begin exerting its political leadership on behalf of a strategy that now enjoyed NATO's endorsement, and it gave Allied defense officials powerful arguments to take to their own parliaments. MC 14/3's political effects began to be felt shortly after it was adopted and grew steadily over the next decade.

Above all, MC 14/3 settled matters sufficiently to allow the Alliance to put its stressful strategy debate behind it. NATO finally had shed its nuclear fixation without stripping away the positive features of nuclear deterrence. With consensus reestablished on strategy, NATO now was in a position to pursue a better conventional defense in the confidence that this effort would be guided by agreed purposes rather than paralyzed by disputes over fundamentals. MC 14/3 thus stands as a major accomplishment in NATO's history.

Since MC 14/3 promised to be only as good as the forces that were built to support it, the task now facing NATO was to get on with assembling the required defense posture. Although MC 14/3 had pointed out the broad direction that NATO was to take in planning its conventional forces, it did not define exactly how strong this posture should become or when it should be fielded. Force goals and target dates were not specified in its pages. Its main contribution in this area was to create a conceptual framework for NATO's conventional defenses within which the Alliance could operate in the coming years. While it mandated that its minimum floor was to be met immediately, it provided the Alliance considerable flexibility in defining the ceiling and building toward it. Moreover, MC 14/3 specified no fixed division of labor to guide NATO's nations in this endeavor. It established no minimum national obligations, nor did it discourage any single nation from contributing more than its fair share. It left programmatic decisions of this sort in the hands of NATO's future leaders. To them was entrusted the task of deciding upon the exact kind of defense posture and pattern of burden sharing that was needed to execute the new strategy.



## **X. NATO FORCE TRENDS: THE UNEVEN PATH TO PROGRESS**

The adoption of MC 14/3 represented the culminating step of NATO's strategy debates in the 1960s. But NATO's progress was not limited solely to strategy. Behind the scenes, in a less visible way, this decade also witnessed important changes to NATO's conventional and nuclear force posture. Not all of these changes were for the better; indeed, a few were for the worse. But when the dust had settled, NATO's forces emerged from this turbulent decade in substantially better shape than they had entered it.

One negative development was the Vietnam War, which, among its many effects, diverted U.S. political attention and military resources from Europe. This especially was the case from 1966 onward, when the U.S. buildup in Southeast Asia began gathering force. As the buildup proceeded, the United States enlarged its active ground posture by three divisions (two Army and one Marine). But even so, the eventual deployment of ten Army and two Marine divisions to Vietnam left the United States a central reserve of only four active divisions and comparably small tactical air forces. This reduced Washington's ability to reinforce NATO (or elsewhere) in the event of war.

Equally important, Vietnam's demands led to a decline in the readiness of U.S. forces that were deployed in Europe. Personnel turbulence developed as tours of qualified soldiers were cut short in order to meet manpower needs in Vietnam; equipment stocks were also depleted to meet logistic demands there. The budgetary drain of the Vietnam war further exacerbated tensions over balance of payments and foreign exchange issues, which were coming to affect U.S.-German relations. The United States initially tried not to let Vietnam degrade its presence in Europe. But in the face of these mounting problems, Washington succumbed in 1968 by deciding to withdraw 34,000 military personnel, two combat brigades of the 24th Mechanized Division, and three tactical air squadrons from Europe.

These withdrawals were justified publicly as a necessary step to bolster the U.S. strategic reserve, and American officials insisted that no change in the U.S. commitment was implied. The withdrawn combat units were configured in a "dual base" status in which their commitment to NATO was not altered; much of their equipment was left behind in storage to permit a prompt return. The United States began the "REFORGER" program, in which withdrawn ground and air units were flown back to Central Europe to

participate in annual exercises. In succeeding years, REFORGER was to grow in size and stature, eventually becoming a major vehicle for increasingly tying U.S.-based forces to NATO's defense plans.

Despite these offsetting measures, however, this drawdown did not augur well for the future, and it triggered a nervous reaction in Western Europe. During the Eisenhower years, the U.S. military presence in Europe had averaged about 390,000 soldiers. At the height of the Berlin buildup, it had peaked at about 417,000 soldiers. Although this level was artificially high because of the temporary nature of many U.S. deployments, it sent a reassuring signal to the Allies, who then began employing it as a measuring stick to gauge the U.S. commitment. The post-Berlin drawdown, an inevitable step, had led to the return to the United States of some 60,000 troops. De Gaulle's decision to expel U.S. forces from France then led to the withdrawal of 15,000 more as part of McNamara's efforts to increase efficiency. The final withdrawal of 34,000, which had overtones of American displeasure with the Allies, had brought American troop strength down to about 300,000. By any standard, this was still a large presence, but it was smaller than what the Eisenhower administration, for all its nuclear fixations, had provided.

Notwithstanding these steps, the 1960s as a whole saw major improvements to the overall U.S. military contribution to NATO.<sup>1</sup> In particular, the Army made big strides toward converting its straight-leg infantry divisions to armored and mechanized status, thereby rendering them better able to compete with Soviet tank divisions on the battlefield. In the early 1950s, four of the Army's five divisions in Europe had been infantry units (the other was an armored division). The late 1950s had seen one of these infantry divisions converted to armored status. The 1960s were to see all three of the remaining divisions (one now dual-based) converted to mechanized status, thereby producing a well-armed force of two armored and three mechanized divisions, supported by three armored cavalry regiments. This trend was replicated in the Army's overall posture, including NATO-oriented units based in the United States. In 1960, only two of the Army's 14 active divisions were armored and none were mechanized. By 1968, eight divisions (of 18 total) were either armored or mechanized, a major improvement.

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<sup>1</sup>For an analysis of NATO's doctrinal and program debates in the early 1970s, see Henry A. Kissinger's memoirs, *Years of Upheaval* and *White House Years*, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1979 and 1982.

The Army also benefited from the expensive modernization programs that McNamara funded: Virtually all of the Army's weapons were replaced by new, qualitatively superior models. In 1961, the Army's inventory of 8600 tanks had been dominated by the old M-48, which mounted only a 90 mm gun and lacked a modern fire control system. Also, the M-48 was powered by a gasoline engine that consumed a large quantity of fuel, which limited its sustainability and made it highly explosive if hit by enemy fire. By the late 1960s, over 5000 new M-60s had entered service. This tank was much more capable than the M-48. It carried a more powerful 105 mm gun, an improved fire control system, and a more survivable and endurable diesel engine. To complement this tank, procurement of new M-113 armored personnel carriers was accelerated. These vehicles carry infantry to support the Army's tanks in mobile operations. By the end of the decade, the Army's total armor capability had increased by about 50 percent since 1960.

Another Army improvement was the acquisition of large 155 mm self-propelled artillery to replace lower caliber and towed pieces. The Army's total artillery inventory grew by 80 percent and its firepower increased by an even greater amount. The Army's helicopter inventory grew from 3100 to 7500, and old models with piston engines were replaced by modern helicopters with turbine engines. This improvement bolstered the Army's battlefield mobility and permitted the creation of an entire airmobile division. The Army's stockpile of cargo trucks, an important area often neglected at budget time, similarly expanded by 60 percent. This change in logistic support bolstered the Army's ability to deliver ammunition and supplies to frontline units and produced a substantial increase in deliverable firepower, especially artillery munitions.

The combined effect of these modernization programs, along with the force posture expansion also undertaken, was profound. Total Army combat power (the Vietnam-related expansion not included) roughly doubled. The Army also was now internally structured to fight a conventional war rather than purely tactical nuclear combat. With respect to NATO, the Vietnam buildup constrained the Army's ability to bring the full force of its combat power to bear. But even at the height of the Vietnam War, the United States still retained the capacity to reinforce NATO with a combination of active and reserve forces in a crisis. All changes taken into account, the Army in the late 1960s was capable of deploying in the critical initial weeks roughly 70 percent more combat power than had been the case in 1961.

In addition to these changes in active forces, McNamara continued his efforts to tailor the Army's reserve forces to support U.S. defense strategy. In the late 1960s, he unveiled a plan to combine Reserve and National Guard units into a single overall command structure (not approved by the Congress). In addition, he announced a program to reconfigure their combat units into a force of eight divisions (six intended for overseas combat) and 21 separate brigades, a step that was approved. At first glance, this appeared to be a large reduction from earlier levels. In early 1961, the Reserve and Guard together had deployed 37 divisions. Even after McNamara's initial reforms that year, the level stood at 27 divisions. But in reality, this change was designed to improve the ability of these forces to contribute where they were needed most: in the early stages of a war.

During this period, the paid "drill strength" of the Reserve and Guard remained roughly constant at 600-700,000 soldiers. As a result, each of the 37 divisions in 1961 was manned at well less than 50 percent of needed strength and would have required months of mobilization and training before being ready for combat. McNamara's reforms in 1961 had increased manning levels for the remaining 27 divisions to 50-75 percent, thereby theoretically rendering them deployable within a few weeks. Subsequent analysis revealed, however, that these divisions also lacked required amounts of combat and support equipment. Since the Army's inventory did not have enough items to equip them speedily in an emergency, their deployment would have had to been delayed until entirely new equipment could be produced from production lines. As a result, they still could not have been shipped overseas for many months.

McNamara determined that the Defense Department could not afford to buy enough equipment for these units anytime in the foreseeable future. He therefore consolidated these units into the smaller force of eight divisions and 21 brigades, the number needed to support DoD's initial war plans. These units were manned at 93 percent of required levels; moreover, each was given a full complement of equipment. McNamara also accelerated DoD's program to affiliate several of the brigades with active Army divisions and to orient the training of remaining units to actual contingencies and operational plans. These changes provided a large reserve force of about 15 division-equivalents (three brigades are counted as the equivalent of one division) for deployment 30-60 days after mobilization. This represented a vast improvement over 1960.

McNamara also acted to make full use of the remaining Reserve/Guard manpower that had not been allocated to combat units. The expansion of the Army's active combat forces had left the Army short of manpower for essential support units, especially the units that provide enduring sustainability. At the time, each Army division included about 16,000 soldiers. But another 32,000 troops were deemed necessary to support each division: 16,000 to provide an "initial support increment" (ISI), and another 16,000 to provide a "sustaining support increment" (SSI). To satisfy unmet support requirements, McNamara allocated some 130,000 Reserve soldiers to SSI units. Active manpower was concentrated in the combat and initial support forces that would be needed immediately, while Reserve manpower was employed to fill out support units that would be needed later. Meanwhile, National Guard troops primarily manned combat units. Table 3 displays how the Army had come to be structured by the late 1960s.<sup>2</sup>

Parallel, if less dramatic, improvements were made in U.S. tactical air forces. During this period, the Air Force's inventory remained constant at about 7000 aircraft and 21-24 active combat wings, backed up by some ten reserve wings. Improvements primarily came in the form of qualitative upgrades. In 1961, only 15 percent of the Air Force's interceptors were all-weather models; by 1970, the figure stood at over 60 percent. The acquisition of modern F-4 fighter-bombers greatly improved the Air Force's ability to conduct nonnuclear ground attack operations. Before their arrival, Air Force airplanes were primarily oriented to air defense and nuclear strike operations. Between 1961 and 1968, the Air Force's ability to deliver payload in conventional missions (as measured in tonnage dropped) roughly doubled; by the early 1970s, it was to double again. Additionally, the Vietnam War led the Air Force to develop better munitions (e.g., electro-optical and laser guided bombs) and better command and control systems for conducting large-scale air campaigns. These improvements enhanced the

Table 3

U.S. ARMY STRUCTURE: LATE 1960s

	Divisions	ISI	SSI
Active	19	19	11
Reserve/Guard	8	8	16

<sup>2</sup>The following discussion draws on McNamara's annual reports.

NATO's ground forces with a large quantity of interdiction and close air support missions.

The Navy experienced a similar pattern. It continued to deploy some 15 carriers, 105 attack submarines, 260 surface combatants, and 160 logistic/support ships, about the level that McNamara had set in 1961. But the Navy's combat power increased steadily through qualitative improvements. Acquisition of modern fighters and fighter/bombers strengthened the capability of its carriers to conduct air defense and strike operations. The acquisition of modern attack submarines and P-3 patrol aircraft equipped with sonobuoys and torpedoes more than doubled the Navy's capability for antisubmarine warfare (ASW). Procurement of missile-carrying surface combatants improved the Navy's antiair warfare (AAW) strength by a similar amount. These changes in strike, ASW, and AAW capabilities bolstered the Navy's capacity not only to protect the searoutes but also to conduct power projection missions in high threat areas.

McNamara also carried forward his earlier efforts to strengthen the Defense Department's ability to conduct combined operations and to encourage the three services to work together, rather than independently and often at cross-purposes. In 1961, he had found that the Defense Department's logistics planning was badly out of balance. The Air Force and the Navy concentrated on a brief period of nuclear operations and lacked the sustaining stocks, including munitions, for a conventional war of any duration. The Army meanwhile was planning for a conventional war of almost indefinite duration, one that the Air Force and Navy could not support.

Further compounding this problem was the practice that the Army employed in procuring its logistics stocks. Faced with funding limitations, the Army had distributed its resources across the entire spectrum of logistics needs, short and long. As a result, it lacked adequate stockpiles of all relevant ammunition and equipment that would be needed in the initial weeks of combat in Europe. This created a risk that the Army's performance might be undercut by shortages in a few critical areas: artillery ammunition is a good example. To rectify these problems, McNamara issued guidance for all three services to meet a single standard of logistics readiness: stockpiles for six months of combat. This, he calculated, would help ensure that all the services could function in a NATO-Warsaw Pact war. Requirements for most items after the six-month mark, he determined, would be met by the production pipeline.

A final and important area of U.S. conventional improvements came in strategic mobility forces, an area that McNamara had been examining from his earliest days. His analyses of likely contingencies led him to conclude that the United States should develop the capability to deploy its entire active Army and Air Force overseas (to Europe, in particular) within only 4–8 weeks. Since a single Army division weighed over 100,000 tons and came equipped with thousands of vehicles, this yielded a daunting requirement of over two million tons of cargo. This requirement, in turn, levied a demand for very large mobility forces: A single modern air transport could carry only 20–40 tons on one mission, and even a large cargo ship could carry only some 10,000–20,000 tons.

In the early 1960s, McNamara had set an improvement program in motion by procuring C-130 and C-141 transport aircraft and several other measures. In the late 1960s, he expanded this program considerably. He initiated procurement of some 60 C-5A air transports. Each airplane could carry some 70 tons of cargo, including most items of Army equipment. In total, he set a goal for airlift forces to include the C-5As, some 150 C-141 transports, and about 500 C-130s. To supplement this force, he initiated a program with DoD funding support to configure civilian cargo aircraft for military use in an emergency; this effort later was expanded to include Allied transports as well.

With respect to sealift forces, the problem he faced was one of mobilizing an already large capability. He approved a program to assemble over 400 cargo ships. Some were to come from the Navy reserve fleet but most were to be drawn from the U.S. and Allied civilian fleets. The task of mobilizing these ships in a crisis, however, could be time-consuming. In any event, most of these ships were slow-moving. This meant that a reliable sealift capability to Europe would take about a full month to establish. To create a more responsive sealift capability, McNamara fastened upon the goal of procuring some 30 "Fast Deployment Logistics" (FDL) ships, an idea that he presented to the Congress during 1967–1968.

Subsequent analysis was to show that McNamara's estimate of strategic lift requirements was understated. Even so, not all of his strategic lift programs came to pass. In particular, the FDL program was not funded, but the remaining programs largely were implemented, albeit on a schedule slower than McNamara preferred. Their combined effect was to accelerate the pace at which U.S. combat power could be deployed to Europe in an emergency, even one offering little advanced warning. These

lift measures, coupled with the programs to strengthen the U.S. ground and air combat forces that were committed to NATO, all worked together to enable the United States to make a contribution toward improving NATO's conventional defenses in Europe.

### **EMERGENCE OF THE WEST GERMAN ARMY**

Even greater than this growth in U.S. combat power was the emergence of the German Bundeswehr (army and airforce) as a first-class fighting force. This was a little-noticed event but one of seminal importance. It gave NATO the solid military foundation it needed to undertake both a strategy change and a commitment to a true "forward defense." By and large, the event went unheralded and has largely escaped notice in most academic accounts of NATO's security policy in the 1960s, but it made an indelible mark on the battlefield, where deterrence is forged. In essence, it transformed the military balance in Central Europe in fundamental ways, all of which contributed heavily to Alliance security.<sup>3</sup>

Budgetary cutbacks and recruiting problems caused the original schedule for German rearmament to be stretched out several years. But by August 1956, the FRG had created staffs for the first six of its 12 divisions. Later that year, rearmament gathered momentum as these divisions were provided a full complement of officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs), a compulsory service law was passed to fill out enlisted ranks, and 1100 M-47 tanks arrived from the United States. In succeeding months, the FRG ordered some 2500 U.S. M-48 tanks, initiated production of its own antitank guns, and purchased other equipment to provide necessary weapons for its emerging Army.

With adequate equipment on hand, the new divisions began their initial field training. By mid-1958, four had reached the stage where formal commitment to NATO became possible; shortly afterward, the next two joined. In 1959, four more divisions commenced buildup and deployment. They were committed to NATO in 1962. In the early 1960s, the final two divisions began forming and soon came under SACEUR's control. Meanwhile, a parallel buildup of the German Air Force and Navy also was being pursued. By 1965, as a result, the FRG was able to bring its rearmament effort to a successful culmination for its active forces: deployment of a 12-division Army, an Air Force of ten tactical fighter wings, and a Navy of 12 squadrons. German reserves were created in the 1970s.

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<sup>3</sup>See McNamara's annual reports for FY68 and 69.



The German buildup added enormous muscle to NATO's posture. It bolstered NATO's air arm by about 30 percent. Its effect on NATO's maritime posture was less marked, but it did provide the important capability for defending the Baltic and the critical Danish Straits. On land, each German division fielded more soldiers than its U.S. counterpart and deployed a similar complement of heavy weapons. The German Army was able to form three powerful, independent corps that were promptly integrated into NATO's operational scheme. In total, the German Army virtually doubled NATO's peacetime strength.

During these years, the German Army also underwent a series of internal changes as its doctrine evolved. Its divisions originally had been structured along traditional lines with three regimental-style "combat commands" apiece. In 1959 they were altered to a configuration that included three independent brigades (called Army Structure 2). Although this change was partly intended to prepare the Army's divisions for nuclear operations, it also was aimed at strengthening their capability for conventional combat. The Germans thus stopped short of fully emulating the U.S. Pentomic division and its nuclear-oriented five battle groups. Most German motorized infantry units were converted to mechanized status by receiving armored personnel carriers. This left the German Army dominated by armored and armored infantry (mechanized) brigades. The former had four battalions and the latter three. Each also included a battalion of field artillery. All support elements were to be armored. Although this mechanization provided German combat and support forces protection against nuclear blasts, it also gave them the mobility needed to contend with purely conventional Soviet armored attacks.

As the 1960s unfolded, the German Army, acting on SACEUR's guidance, increasingly trained for the conventional and tactical nuclear operations that would be the first stage of flexible response. NATO's emerging doctrine created new requirements that spawned a second internal change, which was undertaken in 1967 (Structure 3). At the time, the German Army was composed of seven mechanized (panzergrenadier), three armored (panzer), one mountain, and one airborne division. Two of the mechanized divisions were converted into Jaeger infantry units and were assigned to cover the Hessian Hills and the Bavarian forest, terrain that did not require much armor. The armored vehicles from these divisions were then used to form three new tank regiments, one of which was assigned to each corps. Some 10,000 soldiers were taken from support

units, converted into infantry troops, and assigned to the combat divisions. Their support functions were transferred to reserve units. These changes bolstered the capability of the three German corps for combined arms operations. The extra infantry enlarged the "foxhole strength" of each division, thereby improving its ability to hold ground and to withstand the enemy infantry attacks that normally precede tank assaults. The additional tank regiments provided each corps a stronger armored reserve for containing localized penetrations. Taken together, they strengthened the German Army's ability to conduct a firm conventional and nuclear defense.

This trend was reinforced by the high degree of proficiency that the German Army showed. Regardless of weapons inventories, newly created armies typically lack the operational expertise that plays a large role in their ability to fight effectively, particularly on the modern battlefield, which demands complicated military maneuvers and skillful coordination. The German Army, however, was able to overcome this problem by filling its officer and NCO positions with skilled veterans from World War II and by drawing on the experience gained in that war. As a result, the German Army quickly emerged as one of NATO's best, matching both the experienced American and British armies. Rather than detracting from NATO's mastery of the tactics and the operational art of war, the German Army added strength.

## **FORWARD DEFENSE CONCEPT**

The deployment of the German Army, and the professionalism it brought to NATO, played a major role in NATO's adoption of the forward defense concept. While this change was formally codified in MC 14/3, it was first initiated in 1963 when SHAPE issued planning guidance that moved NATO's main line of resistance close to the inter-German border. The political genesis of this change was the FRG's growing insistence that West Germany should draw the full benefit of its membership in NATO and its contributions to the Alliance's military strength. Its timing was shaped largely by the schedule on which the West Germany Army was deployed. As a result, the forward defense concept increasingly took shape between 1958 and 1967.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>See Stanley M. Kanarowski, *The German Army and NATO Strategy*, Fort Leslie J. McNair, National Defense University Press, Washington, D.C., Monograph Series No. 82-2, 1982. Also see Philip A. Karber and John H. Milam, "The Federal Republic of Germany," in Jeffrey Simon (ed.), *NATO-Warsaw Pact Force Mobilization*, National Defense University Press, Washington, D.C., 1982.

The original rationale for the Rhine defense line had been purely military: NATO lacked the overall military strength for a forward defense, and many of its units (French, British, Dutch, and Belgian) were based so far to the rear that they could not reach the forward areas in time to counter a surprise attack. By the early 1960s German rearmament had begun altering this military equation. As the new German divisions were activated, they mostly were deployed in the forward areas, near such exposed cities as Hamburg, Hannover, and Nuremburg. Moreover, they were distributed in rather uniform fashion on a north-south axis across the entire nation. This was done partly for purely national reasons. It enabled the FRG to make use of available kasernes, and it also guaranteed that if the Alliance did not respond in a crisis, at least German units would be available to defend the entire country. But by intention, it also had a powerful influence on NATO's defense options. It provided NATO the military wherewithal to contemplate a forward defense along the entire frontier. Equally important, it guaranteed that fighting would begin in the forward areas and that the key battles would be fought there. Since NATO could hardly afford to divide its forces by having some forward and some back, it now had a powerful incentive to shift its operational center of gravity forward.

The exact military doctrine that NATO adopted in these years was the product of a complicated military calculus. The exposed location of many FRG cities and the forward positioning of German Army units guaranteed that many advancing Soviet units would first be engaged directly at the inter-German border itself. At the same time, Western doctrine at the time called for flexible retrogrades in the forward corps sectors, especially against larger attacking forces. The purpose of this doctrine was to reduce losses while allowing NATO's units to employ maneuver tactics to inflict high casualties on advancing enemy formations. Also, the most defensible terrain in many areas lay somewhat to the rear, especially in northern Germany, where the Aller, Leine, and Weser Rivers typically ran between 20 and 100 kilometers west of the border. In southern Germany, the rough terrain around Hesse and Fulda, the Main and Danube Rivers, and the Bavarian mountains and forests all argued for a defense closer to the border. As a result, NATO's military plans in the 1960s came to envision localized mobile operations within the framework of forward defense. NATO's covering forces and main maneuver units were to initiate defense operations well forward. But if things did not go well, they were expected to retrograde until they reached favorable terrain, where an unyielding main line of resistance was to be established.

The forward defense concept thus represented a balance between political dictates and military exigencies. It provided NATO with military options for defending the far forward cities and all FRG territory. But it recognized military realities and the necessity of taking advantage of modern doctrine and appropriate terrain features. Also, it enabled NATO to orient its main effort to blocking access to the Lowlands and protecting the industrial Ruhr and the Frankfurt area. For these reasons, this concept served as a basis for NATO's planning from 1963 onward.

NATO's front line thus had undergone an important odyssey of its own, one that is often overlooked by critics who claim that NATO made little military progress in the 1960s. While the forward defense concept reflected the political imperative of protecting the FRG's territory, it represented more than a politically inspired decision to draw an imaginary and indefensible line on a map. Since NATO's military authorities had long been chary of establishing front lines that they could not defend, the forward defense concept reflected an official military assessment of the growing strength of NATO's forces. This important change may have gone largely unnoticed by the Western public, but its implications doubtless were not lost on Moscow. In any event, as NATO's units began to develop plans for defending forward and to conduct military exercises on the relevant terrain, they acquired the ability to execute this concept. The result was to make NATO's defense posture an increasingly difficult nut to crack.

Adding to NATO's political and military strength was the manner in which missions for executing the forward defense concept were allocated. Ever since the original rearmament decision, Bonn had insisted that the other NATO Allies should join with the FRG in accepting responsibility for defending West Germany. Its determination in this regard hardened when the forward defense concept was adopted. Purely military factors figured importantly in this calculus. Given density considerations, the German Army alone could not hope to establish a viable line along the entire front. In World War II, a German division normally had been able to defend only about 10-20 kilometers of frontage depending upon the terrain. The acquisition of modern weapons with greater lethal range and mobility promised to expand this frontage, but there were still practical limits on how much frontage a modern division could cover, especially if it was to withhold some reserves that could contain early breakthroughs and provide some staying power. For this reason, modern defensive frontages typically were set in the range of only 20-30 kilometers. Also, virtually the entire forward area needed to be covered in

adequate density to block the invasion routes that were scattered up and down the border. As a result, at least 25-30 divisions were needed to defend a linear front line.

Beyond this, political motivations were important as well. The Germans wanted other Allied units to stand alongside them to ensure that a Soviet attack could not be directed only to FRG forces. With Allied units interlaced with German forces, any enemy assault automatically would draw many other NATO nations into the fray and thereby would commit the Alliance as a whole, including the United States. Deterrence would be enhanced; in particular, NATO's willingness to escalate would be strengthened when the time came. This political consideration, reinforced by military logic, led to agreement on a "layer cake" or "club sandwich" concept for establishing national corps sectors along the front line. In this concept, all Central Region national armies, minus the French (see below), were assigned a critical corps-sized portion of the front. Moreover, Allied corps were intermingled with German corps-sized formations uniformly across the front. This deployment pattern meant that no single mass of German units could readily be isolated for attack while Allied formations were bypassed.

In the layer cake concept, the Central Region (AFCENT) was divided into two Army Groups: the Northern Army Group (NORTHAG) and the Central Army Group (CENTAG). To the immediate north of NORTHAG's boundary, a large German division was deployed to guard the Hamburg-Lubeck area and the approaches to Denmark. In wartime, it was to come under the command of the AFNORTH commander (who was responsible for defending Denmark, the Danish Straits, and Norway) and to join with the Danish Army in protecting the Jutland Peninsula. In NORTHAG itself, the Dutch I Corps and German I Corps were deployed next to each other to block a Soviet advance on the North German Plain. Immediately to the south of German I Corps, the BAOR was assigned to guard the Braunschweig approach and the Autobahn leading to Hannover and the Paderborn Plain. Further south, the Belgian I Corps was directed to defend the Gottingen Gap and the avenues of advance to the nearby Weser River.

In CENTAG, German III Corps was deployed astride the Hessian corridor, to guard the NORTHAG-CENTAG boundary, and to support the Belgians. To the south, U.S. V and VII Corps were assigned responsibility for a wide sector covering the Fulda Gap, the Meinengen Gap, the Coburg Approach, the Cheb Gap, and the Hof Corridor. Along CENTAG's southern boundary, where the terrain favors the defender more than most other areas, German II Corps was directed to defend a broad frontage covering the

Highway 14 approach, the Boehmer Wald, the Fuerth Approach, and the German-Austrian border.

Although NATO military authorities designed this layer cake concept, several arguments were directed against it. The main argument was that it reflected the accidents of World War II rather than a coherent defense philosophy. It left the powerful U.S. Army in southern Germany and entrusted the defense of the more dangerous northern areas to presumably less capable Allied forces. A second argument was that it was so preoccupied with political concerns that it produced an operationally unmanageable hodgepodge of national corps sectors with dissimilar doctrines and force structures. A third argument was that it divided the German Army to the point where it could not gain full operational benefit from its large mass. Also, it seemed likely to compel deployment of U.S. reserves (arriving from the United States) to the northern area, thereby dissipating the mass of the U.S. Army as well.

All three of these arguments had merit; indeed, they were to lead NATO in the 1970s and 1980s to take steps to reduce the layer cake's vulnerabilities. But they also were beside the point. If the German Army had been built to a much larger size, a different concept conceivably could have been adopted. For example, the Germans could have defended more than three forward sectors, and forces from the Low Countries could have reverted largely to a reserve role. But given the limited size of the German Army and NATO's posture, as well as German deployment patterns and the high budgetary cost of moving U.S. forces, the Alliance as a practical matter had no other alternative.

Additionally, the layer cake has important assets that its critics often ignored. For example, removal of Dutch and Belgian forces from the front line would have partially disengaged these nations from NATO's decisionmaking in a crisis, given them fewer incentives to maintain their forces at a ready state, and required their forces to function as operational reserves for which they were not well-suited. Moreover, criticisms of the layer cake implicitly assumed that Dutch, Belgian, and Danish forces would not fight effectively and that strong U.S. forces were not needed in the Fulda-Meinengen area. Neither assumption was valid. While the layer cake might not have been militarily ideal, it by no means was an operationally infeasible arrangement. Its successful execution required prompt mobilization by all participants in a crisis and close coordination in wartime, tasks that are difficult but still manageable. All things considered, adoption of

this concept represented an important step forward for NATO, not a step backward. Precisely for this reason, NATO's frontal defense and layer cake deployment has survived the test of time. It remains the foundation for NATO's forward defense concept today.

### **ALLIED DRAWDOWNS AND THE FRENCH WITHDRAWAL**

Partially offsetting these gains was a series of actions taken by some Allied nations in the late 1960s to pare back their forces, despite MC 14/3's adoption and U.S. complaints. The Belgians completed their decade-long drawdown by reducing their Army to only two divisions and two reserve brigades. Despite successful negotiations with the FRG on reducing foreign exchange costs associated with the stationing of British troops in West Germany, the U.K. withdrew one brigade and one tactical air squadron. Later, several thousand soldiers were withdrawn for duty in Ulster. Although these soldiers could have returned quickly, their removal degraded the BAOR's readiness. As a result, the BAOR's force level had declined from 77,000 in 1957 to about 52,000 in 1968. The Canadians reduced from one division to a single brigade. Dutch and Danish defense spending was influenced by competing domestic programs and liberal constituencies; as a result, their forces also declined in readiness and modernization.<sup>5</sup>

These downward trends marked an important change in NATO's burden sharing arrangements in the 1960s. NATO originally was created as an alliance in which all powers were to play a major contributing role. By the end of the 1960s, a new pattern had begun to emerge in which the United States and West Germany provided the lion's share of forces while the other allies relegated themselves to a lesser status. This diminished role was particularly noticeable with respect to Belgium, the Netherlands, and Denmark, all of which scaled back their contributions as West Germany's military strength grew. At the same time, however, this adverse trend began to stabilize itself as the 1960s drew to a close. The British decided to withdraw their forces East of Suez, a development that curtailed their presence elsewhere around the globe but enabled them to concentrate their military resources on the defense of Europe. Meanwhile, the Dutch,

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<sup>5</sup>See Philip A. Karber and A. Grant Whitley, "The Operational Realm," in James R. Golden et al., *NATO at Forty: Change, Continuity, and Prospects*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1989, Ch. 7, pp. 122-154.

Belgian, and Danish governments expressed their intent at least to continue meeting the obligations that were still theirs. Although their defense efforts continued to slacken in many areas, they did maintain most of their commitments to specific NATO ground, air, and naval missions.

The most serious reversal of all, of course, was France's withdrawal from the NATO integrated military command. While this step was formalized in 1966, it had been underway in stages for several years. Its origins went back to France's failure in the 1950s to secure a satisfactory role in NATO for itself; key contributing events were the 1956 Suez crisis and U.S. reluctance to aid France's nuclear programs. In response, de Gaulle, shortly after assuming power, began his campaign to distance France from NATO and to assert French leadership in Western Europe as a counterweight to the United States. In 1959, the French Mediterranean fleet was removed from NATO command; also, nuclear-capable U.S. air squadrons (250 aircraft) were compelled to leave when de Gaulle vetoed further U.S. storage of nuclear weapons on French soil. In 1960, Paris refused to participate fully in NATO's newly integrated air defense system. In 1963, the French Atlantic fleet was withdrawn. In 1963, the French also declined to assign their Army's newly created First Corps to NATO (the already-existing Second Corps remained under NATO command). In 1965, a new tactical air command was established under national control and not assigned to NATO. Early in 1966, the French declined to participate in NATO military exercises that, they felt, departed from MC 14/2. Against this background, France's formal departure from NATO's integrated military structure later that year was not without ample precedent.

By this time, the French Army, which was withdrawn from Algeria in the early 1960s, had made progress in rebuilding itself. By late 1966, it fielded four divisions (expanded to five a year later). Two of these divisions, which were based in West Germany, and seven air wings had been assigned to NATO. The remainder, based in France, were retained under French control but were available for commitment to NATO in a crisis. De Gaulle's action removed all of these ground and air forces from their previous commitments to NATO's operational plans. Beyond doubt, this was a troublesome loss for NATO: It took away about 15 percent of the Alliance's M-day military strength.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>For details, see David C. Isby and Charles Kamps, Jr., *Armies of NATO's Central Front*, Janes, London, 1987.



Further complicating this loss was an additional unsettling development. French forces were instructed to execute a new, purely national military doctrine, one that was not ostensibly aligned with NATO's strategy. According to French declaratory policy, they no longer were intended for automatic employment in NATO's forward defense of West Germany. Instead they were oriented to protecting French territory. This suggested that they might enter combat only after NATO's defenses had collapsed and enemy troops were advancing on France itself. At this point, French policy implied, they would engage the enemy with a tactical nuclear barrage, to be followed, if necessary, by a nuclear attack on the Soviet Union itself. The purpose of this "deterrent maneuver" would be to persuade the Soviets to stop short of any violation of French borders. It also implied that France would cross the nuclear threshold, conduct a tactical nuclear campaign on German soil, and possibly start a general nuclear war independently of parallel actions by NATO. On the surface, this doctrine hardly seemed in the spirit of MC 14/3; indeed, it threatened to undercut the basis of flexible response.

To compound things, de Gaulle requested that NATO remove all U.S., Canadian, and NATO forces from France, all NATO headquarters and command staffs, and virtually all military facilities. Although he stretched out his initially tight deadline of four months, even the revised schedule of one year levied a daunting requirement on NATO. Withdrawal of NATO's combat forces involved the vacating of eight airbases, a few ground installations, and many related facilities. Removal of NATO's headquarters imposed an equally tough administrative burden. Since the Alliance's inception, Paris had been NATO's institutional home. NATO's large civilian headquarters was located there, as was SHAPE, AFCENT, the U.S. European command (EUCOM), and other staffs. Since NATO was compelled quickly to make other arrangements, the task of moving to Belgium, Germany, and elsewhere consumed a great deal of time and energy. For a period, it disrupted normal business and diverted the Alliance's attention from other pressing matters.

In addition, de Gaulle denied NATO the freedom to use French territory for logistic purposes. In some ways, this step dealt NATO the worst blow of all. France had provided NATO the battlefield depth that any army seeks. As a result, NATO had established much of its logistic infrastructure there, where it would be safer from Soviet attack and available to NATO forces if they were compelled to retreat. The U.S. Army's logistic headquarters were located in France, many warehouses and supply installations

were there, and logistic supplies for U.S. and other NATO forces regularly were received in French ports and transported to Germany along French roads and rail lines. De Gaulle's decision not only compelled NATO to move its facilities, but also denied NATO the important military advantage of a secure logistic base on its likely avenue of retreat.

Taken together, de Gaulle's actions inflicted a painful blow on NATO's prestige and Washington's pride. Over time, however, they proved to be less militarily disastrous than surface appearances suggested. Part of the reason was that NATO responded to de Gaulle's rebuff in a measured way. The United States, joined by Britain and the Netherlands, initially took offense. But the FRG and Belgium argued out that France was still a member of the Alliance and urged a cautious response. As a result, NATO set aside the impulse to force a confrontation with de Gaulle and instead behaved in a businesslike fashion. NATO and SHAPE headquarters promptly were welcomed in Belgium, AFCENT moved to the Netherlands, and EUCOM settled in Germany. Within the appointed time, NATO's combat forces also found new homes. NATO also established new logistics arrangements, primarily in the Lowlands and northern Germany. While the new logistic supply bases were less secure, they also were located closer to the forward areas, thus providing shorter supply lines and quicker service.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, France did remain an active, if often troublesome, member of NATO. In addition to retaining its seat on the NAC, Paris continued to participate in all NATO committees that did not involve the integrated military structure. This at least allowed its voice to be heard, and it preserved an adequate institutional framework for maintaining Alliance unity on policy issues. While French forces no longer participated in NATO's military planning, Paris soon signed a bilateral agreement with Bonn to continue basing its forces in West Germany and to conduct regular FRG-French joint exercises. The FRG also was allowed to retain its ammunition storage sites and logistical installations in France that grew out of a 1960 Bonn-Paris bilateral accord. In general, this pattern was to repeat itself elsewhere. The French established distance from NATO's integrated military activities, but they proved willing to continue and even expand bilateral military relationships with individual NATO nations, including the United States.

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<sup>7</sup>See Diego Ruiz Palmer, "France," in Simon (ed.), *NATO and Warsaw Pact Mobilization*, Ch. 9, pp. 269-316.

Nor did French withdrawal from NATO's military structure prove to be complete. In exchange for continued French membership in NATO's air defense alert system (NADGE), Allied military aircraft continued routinely using French airspace. Several NATO nations were permitted to use French training areas, and NATO was allowed to continue using its critical oil pipeline running across France and linking the Atlantic ports to Germany. These and other steps preserved at least a fair degree of French military involvement in NATO and helped buffer the negative effects of withdrawal.

Furthermore, the doctrinal split between France and NATO proved to be less severe than at first seemed likely. In the 1950s, the French Army had been responsible for helping defend the area where West Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia met, the least dangerous area in West Germany. Consistent with the "Weser-Lech" concept at the time, their defense positions were located well in the rear areas about one-half the distance between the inter-German border and the Rhine River. When NATO's forward defense concept was moved forward, the French declined to shift their defense positions into the frontal zone. This sector was assigned to the German II Corps, aided by German territorial reserve units that were being created then. For this reason, France's withdrawal did not deal the forward defense concept a crippling operational blow.

The more serious problem was the depletion of NATO's combat reserves. But even here reality was deceiving. Although de Gaulle had removed French ground forces from formal commitment to NATO, he was careful to preserve the option of promptly recommitting them in a crisis if France's interests so dictated. In 1967 French military authorities gave real life to this option when they reached agreement with NATO on establishing procedures for joint contingency planning. This step reflected Paris's willingness to acknowledge, in private, that French forces would have a far more difficult time stopping a Soviet attack if NATO's armies already had been defeated. Timely commitment of French forces to forestall a NATO collapse thus was an option that Paris was anxious to keep open.

With respect to nuclear escalation, French doctrine also proved to be flexible. Evidently the French remained open to committing the two-division II Corps to NATO in a purely conventional counterattack role to contain a Soviet breakthrough. This concept coincided with NATO's operational needs. NATO's forces did not require additional front-line units, but they did need larger operational reserves, something that the French were willing to provide, albeit on a conditional basis. France's plans for nuclear

escalation evidently centered on the back-up I Corps, but this force was planned for commitment after II Corps. By the time nuclear use by this corps became necessary to defend France, NATO itself in all likelihood would have resorted to nuclear weapons. For this reason, NATO and French military doctrine proved to be less incompatible than de Gaulle's declaratory policy implied.<sup>8</sup>

France's withdrawal from NATO's defenses thus was more apparent than real, and less harmful than many feared. French forces gained flexibility to operate independently, but they also remained capable of working with NATO. The key change was that Paris now reserved the right to make its own decisions. This stance complicated NATO's peacetime planning, but it did not render impossible an effective wartime response. What promised to matter most in a crisis was national priorities. As events unfolded, it became increasingly clear that in an actual crisis, France's priorities probably would not be different from NATO's.

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid. See also Lawrence S. Kaplan and Kathleen A. Kellner, "Lemnitzer: Surviving the French Military Withdrawal," in Jordan (ed.), *Generals in International Politics*, Ch. 5, pp. 93-121.

## XI. ALLIANCE DECAY OR GROWTH?

As the Alliance approached its 20th anniversary in 1969, the Western media often conveyed the impression that NATO, suffering decay from within, was facing a crisis. On the political level, some of this apprehension seemed justified. France had left the military arm of the Alliance. The Germans still harbored their doubts about Washington's leadership and, at Chancellor Brandt's instigation, were pursuing an Ostpolitik seemingly aimed at doing business with the Soviets. The British were caught in an economic malaise that was eroding their defense efforts. Many other Allied nations were falling under the sway of their liberal parliaments and appeared on the verge of sharply scaling back their military commitments.

In the United States, meanwhile, the Johnson administration first had lost domestic support over Vietnam and then had been driven out of office. McNamara, one of NATO's most ardent supporters, had suffered a similar fate. The new President, Richard Nixon, brought a pro-NATO attitude to office and wanted to reinvigorate the Alliance. But even so, the Alliance had changed over the past two decades in important ways. NATO originally had been conceived as a military alliance, but it was born at a time of mounting hopes for an integrated Europe and a close transatlantic community of democratic nations. In the interim, NATO had served its original military purpose well, but the larger hopes that some held for the transatlantic community had been dealt a cruel blow. By 1969, it was apparent that the Alliance was made up of sovereign nations with independent and sometimes conflicting interests. The events of the late 1960s suggested that this harsh reality was causing the transatlantic community to approach the limits of how far it could go—for the moment at least—in the direction of larger visions. West Europeans turned toward the European Economic Community (EEC) as the best vehicle for achieving community-building. NATO's role remained confined to the realm of security policy, an important charter, but still a limited one.

The Alliance thus had lost some of its luster. Moreover, NATO had been so successful at deterring war that some were beginning to question whether the threat of a Soviet invasion was real. A contributing factor here was that the Soviet Union was issuing strong appeals for détente in Europe. The fall of the mercurial Khrushchev in 1964 had ushered in the Brezhnev era. Brezhnev (and his partner at the time, Kosygin)

later came to be associated with stodgy leadership and an often hard line toward the West. But at the time, Brezhnev and Kosygin were viewed as early architects of détente. In 1966 the Warsaw Pact, meeting at Bucharest, had issued a formal appeal for détente; this offer was repeated the next year at Karlovy Vary and again at Budapest in 1968. These communiques contained numerous diplomatic thorns, but they also suggested that a political dialogue with the East was becoming possible. It seemed that the Cold War was declining, the Soviet threat losing its sharp edge, and NATO's mission eroding.

The onset of détente sent worrisome shivers through NATO official circles. One worry was that Western parliaments, never enthusiastic supporters of large defense budgets, would seize the opportunity to scale back military spending in unhealthy ways. An equally important concern was that NATO's nations would begin pursuing individual courses toward Moscow and that the Alliance would unravel from within. The West Europeans worried that the United States, already turning inward as a result of the growing Vietnam debacle, would strike a deal with the Soviets over their heads. The United States, meanwhile, was harboring fears that West Germany, now guided by Brandt's Ostpolitik, would drift away from NATO as it bargained with Moscow on East Germany, Berlin, and a new security order in East Europe. In the end, these fears proved unwarranted: Both the United States and the FRG behaved responsibly. But at the time, neither the United States nor Western Europe knew that this would be the outcome.

Not all of the political trends were negative for the Alliance. NATO had reacted to the Soviet challenge by assigning itself the mission, in the Harmel Report, of orchestrating the West's diplomatic response to détente. It also proclaimed that internal unity and Alliance military strength would help the West channel détente in proper direction. This stance tended to shore up the Alliance's *raison d'être* and provided a rationale for maintaining strong defenses even though the war clouds were dissipating. Aiding NATO's efforts in this regard was that the Soviets, their soothing words notwithstanding, were clearly in the midst of a major defense buildup. In late 1968 they had not only invaded one of their own allies—Czechoslovakia—but had also issued the Brezhnev doctrine, which proclaimed their right to do so again in the future. Their stated willingness to employ military force to punish allies that deviated from the fold raised doubts about their willingness to behave benignly toward West European nations, even those Socialist in the first place.

Détente notwithstanding, NATO's military rationale thus still seemed strong enough to weather attacks from those who claimed that the Soviet threat had disappeared. But beyond doubt, the Alliance's economic foundation was shifting. The now prosperous West European nations had become not only a major, interdependent trading partner of the United States but also, in some respects, a competitor. The result was the onset of growing tensions on trade and financial issues and the rise of American resentment on burden-sharing. In the Congress, disillusionment with Western Europe, spawned by complaints over economic issues and the unhelpful stance of some Allies on Vietnam, was growing at a fast rate. Indeed, Senator Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.) was beginning to gain support for a resolution that he had tabled calling for major American troop withdrawals from Europe. If Mansfield were to succeed, reciprocal Allied steps to pull away from NATO seemed likely. All of this boded ill. Although few sober observers were predicting an imminent collapse, NATO certainly seemed to have fallen on hard times.

In the area of NATO's military strategy and forces, however, the situation was not bleak. The Alliance, to be sure, had gone through a rocky period and had experienced some setbacks. Yet it had successfully adopted a new strategy, one that made military sense while meeting political needs on both sides of the Atlantic. NATO had also strengthened its ability to conduct coalition warfare and to plan together in developing its forces for the future. The 1960s saw not only a sizable U.S. nuclear buildup but also a nuclear sharing agreement and the deployment of several thousand nuclear warheads and delivery systems to Western Europe. As a result, NATO's nuclear deterrent was now unquestionably on solid footing.

Table 4 indicates trends during the 1960s for NATO and Soviet/Warsaw Pact nuclear forces.<sup>1</sup> NATO's strategic nuclear forces grew only modestly while transitioning from bombers to missiles. Meanwhile, NATO's theater systems roughly doubled, primarily because of the U.S. deployment of nuclear tube artillery to U.S. and Allied units. Soviet forces also grew substantially, especially the strategic nuclear forces. By the end of the decade, the Soviets were rapidly approaching strategic parity with the United States and NATO, albeit not in ways threatening the West's deterrent. In theater systems, NATO preserved its roughly 2:1 edge. The net result was to maintain an overall

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<sup>1</sup>Taken from a nuclear database prepared by Philip Karber for the University of Maryland project on Europe's nuclear history.

Table 4

TRENDS IN NUCLEAR FORCES

	U.S./NATO		Soviet/Warsaw Pact	
	1961	1969	1961	1969
<b>Strategic Nuclear Forces</b>				
ICBMs	120	1,054	0-25	858
SLBMs	32	720	25-75	565
Bombers	1,800	600	175	155
Total	1,952	2,374	200-275	1,578
<b>Theater Delivery Systems</b>				
Tube artillery	100	600	0	0
Surface-surface missiles	200	200	50	250
Nuclear capable aircraft	400	550	250	425
Total	700	1,350	300	675

Western numerical lead but to deprive the West of any operationally significant edge. As MC 14/3 recognized, by 1969 the era of mutual nuclear deterrence had arrived.

Equally important, NATO's conventional forces themselves had become considerably stronger. The 1960s saw a second period of growth in the size of NATO's forces (primarily German). This also was a transition decade in which NATO began concentrating on how to improve the quality of its forces rather than simply enlarge them, an approach that would come to dominate the 1970s. The improvements that were made in NATO's forces in the 1960s are often overlooked by arguments that this decade was a period of decline for NATO. The Alliance might have argued a good deal in the 1960s, but it also achieved a fair amount.

The upward trend in NATO's conventional defense posture becomes especially clear if we compare NATO's ground buildup rate in 1969 with that of earlier years. Table 5 displays this trend in division-equivalents (DEs), one useful measure of merit. In this respect, despite the nuclear-inspired downturn of the Eisenhower years, NATO was better off in 1959 than 1949, the year the Alliance was formed. Even so, NATO still was capable of fielding only 17 DEs on M-day and about 26 DEs after a full month of mobilization. By 1969, NATO could deploy 24 DEs on D-day, a number that would grow to 29 if, as expected, the French chose to reassign their forces to NATO in a crisis. Later arrival of U.S. reserves, slowed by reliance on sealift, would have brought the posture higher in succeeding weeks.



Table 5

NATO's GROUND FORCES IN CENTRAL EUROPE  
(Division equivalents)<sup>a</sup>

Year	M-Day	M+10	M+30/45	M+60
1949	9	12	14	16
1959	17	20	22	28
1969 <sup>b</sup>	24	29	37	45

<sup>a</sup>Three independent brigades are counted as one division equivalent.

<sup>b</sup>For 1969, assumes France commits forces after one week.

All told, NATO's strength in maneuver units (at D-day) alone had grown by about 50 percent during the 1960s. Added on was an important internal restructuring by NATO. In 1959, only 13 of NATO's 22 divisions (at M+30) were armored or mechanized units. The remainder—fully 50 percent—were straight-leg infantry units that would have been hard-pressed to compete with Warsaw Pact forces, which had begun converting to armored/mechanized status in the mid-1950s. NATO reacted to this disadvantageous situation by following suit. By 1969, 27 of NATO's 35 divisions were either armored or mechanized. This change bolstered NATO's competitiveness on the battlefield.

This expansion and reconfiguration of NATO's force posture resulted in a major enlargement of NATO's inventory of combat manpower and critical weapons in Central Europe. Table 6 shows that NATO ground manpower increased by about 50 percent in this period; and its inventory of tanks, armored personnel carriers, artillery, antitank weapons, and air defense systems roughly doubled. The gains in air power were less pronounced but not insubstantial.

Adding to this quantitative increase was an important qualitative gain brought about by modernization in virtually all categories. In particular, the 1960s saw the large-scale introduction of the M-60 (U.S.), Chieftain (U.K.), and Leopard I (FRG) tanks, all of which carried large guns, improved armored protection, and powerful diesel engines. In 1959, NATO fielded no modern tanks; by 1969, nearly two-thirds of its tank inventory was modern. Also, NATO's artillery underwent a major modernization program. In 1959, roughly two-thirds of its artillery inventory was dominated by light 105 mm tubes that lacked the range and firepower for modern combat. By 1969, about

Table 6

TRENDS IN NATO's INVENTORY DURING  
THE 1960s (M+30/45)<sup>a</sup>

Item	1959	1969
Combat manpower (000s)	810	1,300
Divisions	24	39
Brigades/regiments	66	105
Division equivalents	22	37
Tanks	2,875	6,900
APCs	5,000	12,500
Antitank weapons	1,875	3,600
Artillery	2,300	3,600
Air defense weapons	1,200	2,000
Combat aircraft	2,400	2,900

<sup>a</sup>My estimates, multiple sources, based on standard planning scenario envisioning full-scale NATO mobilization and reinforcement effort launched a few days after Warsaw Pact mobilization decision.

75 percent of NATO's inventory was composed of heavy 155 mm pieces that met modern standards; most of these were self-propelled models that provided the cross-country mobility towed pieces lacked. The combination of new tanks, self-propelled artillery, and deployment of several thousand armored personnel carriers gave NATO's ground forces the capability to conduct a "combined arms" defense, necessary for defending against Warsaw Pact armored assaults.<sup>2</sup>

Also important, antitank guided missiles began making their appearance in NATO's inventory, thereby giving NATO's infantry a capacity to stand up to enemy tanks. The 1950s had seen the introduction of recoilless rifles that, at the time, were thought capable of offsetting enemy armor. Once the Soviets began introducing T-62 and T-64 tanks with thick armor, however, these weapons began to lose their attractiveness. They lacked the capacity to punch through enemy armor, they were not accurate at the long ranges needed to keep Soviet tanks at bay, and they were too large and cumbersome to deploy in large numbers. NATO turned to antitank missiles to solve this problem. They carried a shaped-charge munition that could penetrate better than a small kinetic energy round, they were more mobile, and they provided additional range.

<sup>2</sup>My estimate, multiple sources. See Isby and Kamps, *Armies of NATO's Central Front*, and Karber and Whitley, "The Operational Realm" for further analysis of NATO's forces and trends.

NATO's systems of the 1960s—the Cobra, ENTAC, SS-11, and Shillelagh—were fairly primitive devices that lacked high individual lethality. But by 1969, NATO had deployed about 2000 of them, enough to begin making a difference by virtue of sheer numbers alone.

The 1960s also saw major progress by NATO in establishing a capable ground-based air defense missile system. In 1959, NATO's air defenses were composed of some 800 antiaircraft guns supported by a small force of Nike Hercules surface-to-air missile (SAM) launchers. This system lacked sufficient numbers to cover West German airspace and it had major weaknesses against high-performance enemy jet aircraft. The guns were usable only at low altitudes, and the Nike Hercules missiles were effective only at high altitudes, leaving a major gap at medium altitudes, where modern aircraft normally operate.

During the 1960s, NATO began introducing such modern, medium altitude systems as the HAWK, BLOODHOUND, and THUNDERBIRD. Also, low altitude missile systems began to be introduced into NATO ground units. By 1969, NATO fielded several hundred SAM missile launchers that, along with its antiaircraft guns, provided a much stronger defense at low and medium altitudes. As a result, NATO was able to form a strong SAM belt along the entire inter-German border, while providing defense of selected targets in the rear areas. This SAM belt was protection for NATO's ground forces and denied Warsaw Pact aircraft ready access to NATO's rear areas. An additional benefit was that this belt enabled NATO's air forces to defend Alliance airspace with fewer interceptors, thereby allowing for diversion of more aircraft into critically important ground attack roles.

NATO's aircraft inventory also expanded during this decade. During the late 1950s, NATO's inventory had dipped downward, largely because several hundred British aircraft were retired as a result of London's budget cutback in 1957. During the 1960s, this reduction was offset by the deployment of the West German Air Force and by the expansion of USAF tactical air forces that McNamara funded. By 1969, NATO's air power posture in Central Europe (at M+30) stood at about 2900 combat aircraft. Although this level was less than ideal, it did provide enough aircraft to perform critical air defense, interdiction, and close air support missions at least at minimum densities.

NATO's air forces also underwent a major modernization program during this decade. By the decade's end, virtually all of NATO's older aircraft had been retired. In

their place stood a modern inventory of F-4 Phantom, F-104 Starfighter, and Buccaneer aircraft, which had considerably better aerodynamic characteristics, avionics, and munitions. Also, they were far better suited for conventional combat and for ground attack missions. Their predecessors had been primarily oriented to nuclear combat, sharply restricting NATO's conventional war-fighting capability.

Measured in absolute terms, NATO's defense posture thus grew importantly in overall capability during the 1960s. Table 7 suggests the magnitude of this upward trend by gauging NATO's combined ground and air combat power in terms of a single static index that combines quantity and quality. The table compares NATO's 1969 posture with the 1959 posture; 1948 is provided as a basis for comparison with NATO at its origins. Overall, during the 1960s, NATO's "in-place" forces and M+30 forces grew by nearly 75 percent in combat power, an impressive amount. What is equally important about the 1969 posture is that NATO's forces now were prepared to fight a conventional war at least initially. In 1959, they had been too small for a conventional defense and were primarily oriented—by training, doctrine, weapons, and structure—for nuclear combat. By 1969, NATO's forces were well on the way toward becoming aligned with NATO's new strategy of flexible response.

Table 7

TRENDS IN NATO's CONVENTIONAL FORCES (M+30/45)  
(Measured in static weapon scores)<sup>a</sup>

Item	1948	1959	1969
In-place ground forces	1.0	4.5	8.1
In-place air forces	.3	1.2	1.7
Ground reinforcements	.2	.6	1.2
Air reinforcements	.2	.5	.8
Total	1.7	6.8	11.8

<sup>a</sup>Author's estimate, multiple sources, based on static weapons scores. See Richard L. Kugler, *Laying the Foundations: The Evolution of NATO in the 1950s*, RAND, N-3105-FF/RC, June 1990, for a discussion of the methodology employed here.

## XII. DYNAMICS OF THE NATO-WARSAW PACT MILITARY BALANCE

NATO's improvements in the 1960s must be judged, of course, in relation to how Warsaw Pact forces evolved during this decade. Their evolution was also considerable. As a result, Central Europe witnessed a considerable expansion of the NATO-Warsaw Pact arms race during this decade. During the early 1960s, Soviet nonnuclear military programs slackened somewhat because of Khrushchev's cutbacks. Beginning in 1964, the Soviets embarked on a major and sustained defense buildup that not only led to a major increase in Soviet nuclear forces but had a marked effect on Soviet/Warsaw Pact conventional forces in Europe as well. These forces did not expand a great deal in size. Apart from the deployment of five Soviet divisions into Czechoslovakia after the 1968 invasion, levels and geographic deployments of Soviet/Warsaw Pact manpower, divisions, and combat aircraft remained roughly constant, but these forces did improve a great deal in combat capability.<sup>1</sup>

Table 8 displays purely quantitative trends for those Soviet/Warsaw Pact forces that would probably have participated in an invasion of Central Europe. Included are some 27 Soviet divisions in Eastern Europe, 30 East European divisions (Polish, Czech, and GDR), and 33 Soviet reserve divisions in the USSR's western military districts, 90 divisions in total. The table shows that Soviet maneuver unit, tank, and artillery

Table 8

### TRENDS IN WARSAW PACT FORCES, 1959-1969<sup>a</sup>

Item	1959	1969
Divisions	90	90
Combat manpower (000s)	1,530	1,620
Tanks	23,000	24,000
APCs	13,000	20,000
Antitank weapons	3,700	4,500
Artillery	7,500	9,000
Combat aircraft	4,000	4,000

<sup>a</sup>My estimates, multiple sources. See Karber and Whitley, "The Operational Realm," for a similar analysis of Warsaw Pact improvement trends.

<sup>1</sup>For a detailed analysis of Soviet/Warsaw Pact force trends in the 1960s, see Thomas Wolfe, *Soviet Power in Europe: 1945-1970*, The Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1970.

inventories grew by only about 10 percent; the air forces did not grow at all. The one major exception is armored personnel carriers, which roughly doubled in size as part of an ongoing effort to fully mechanize Warsaw Pact infantry units.

Within these generally constant force levels, however, Soviet/Warsaw Pact forces grew considerably stronger because of internal modernization with qualitatively better weapons. In particular, Warsaw Pact armored forces benefited from the introduction of T-62 and T-64 tanks, which began entering the inventory in the mid-1960s. In addition, BTR personnel carriers, SAGGER antitank missiles, larger artillery tubes, SAM systems, and modern MiG-21 and SU-7 fighters were introduced in large quantities. Taken together, these increases in quantity and quality produced a roughly 30–40 percent increase in the combat capability of Warsaw Pact forces. This is an impressive amount, but it falls well below NATO's gain of 75 percent.

NATO thus made a net gain, relative to the Warsaw Pact, during the 1960s. Table 9 measures the magnitude of this gain by displaying Warsaw Pact:NATO force ratios at M+30 in the various weapon categories. The table shows that in 1959, NATO still trailed the Warsaw Pact by about 2.7:1 in total capability, taking into account ground and air, and quantity and quality. The difference was even larger in ground maneuver units (4:1) and tanks, where the ratio was a high 8:1. By 1969, this difference had appreciably narrowed. The ratio of total capacity was down to about 1.7:1, with the tank ratio reduced to 3.5:1 and the two sides close to equality in manpower.

Table 9 also shows that the Warsaw Pact still held a sizable lead in forces and capability. What do these data suggest about whether, and to what degree, NATO

Table 9

COMPARATIVE TRENDS: 1959–1969  
(WP:NATO ratios)

Item	1959	1969
Manpower	2.0:1	1.3:1
Division/equivalents	4.0:1	2.4:1
Tanks	8.0:1	3.5:1
APCs	2.6:1	3.2:1
Antitank weapons	2.0:1	1.2:1
Artillery	3.3:1	2.5:1
Combat aircraft	1.7:1	1.4:1
Total capability	2.7:1	1.7:1

succeeded in building a viable conventional defense posture of the sort that confidently could execute MC 14/3? Even if NATO failed to overtake the Warsaw Pact (a goal that it never officially endorsed), did it rectify the conventional balance satisfactorily? If not, by how much did it fall short?

We can best begin gauging the effect of NATO's improvement efforts by setting aside comparisons between NATO and the Warsaw Pact and instead measuring NATO's posture in relation to Western estimates of the force levels that are required for defending Central Europe. The large number of official U.S. and NATO studies that were written over the past years consistently have developed a "theory of requirements" that identifies three different levels of ground capability as being especially required for defense there. The differences among these three levels are largely a function of the ambitiousness of NATO's political and military objectives.

- First, some 25–30 divisions were assessed as needed to form a cohesive front line of divisions and corps to cover the West German border areas, which provide about 750 kilometers of frontage stretching from northern Germany to the Austrian border. A front line of this magnitude, it was held, could confidently provide a few days of forward defense against a massive enemy attack (80–100 divisions), but not much more.
- Second, a total of 40–50 divisions were estimated as required to constitute a credible "initial" defense, one of enough staying power to meet MC 14/3's minimum goals for a posture that could defend forward and delay escalation at least for a few weeks.
- Third, a posture of 50–60 divisions was assessed as needed to provide a confident capability to sustain a forward defense against a strong attacker indefinitely.

This theory of requirements does not postulate that NATO's forces need to match the Warsaw Pact in some mechanistic sense. Instead, it is based on the quite different assumption that NATO's goal is limited to fielding enough forces to execute a defensive strategy whose requirements are dissimilar from those of the offensive strategy being pursued by the Warsaw Pact. For a variety of reasons, military assessments of Central Europe generally held that an attacking Warsaw Pact army would need about 80–100

divisions to conduct a sustained advance against a prepared defense. But, these assessments have held, NATO would enjoy the classical advantages of fighting on the defensive (e.g., prepared positions and preselected terrain) and thus would face a less operationally demanding situation that would require fewer forces.

As a result, the Alliance's studies normally concluded, NATO's posture to some degree could tolerate a numerical disparity and still hope to contain the enemy, even if the Warsaw Pact possessed large enough forces to conduct a wide-ranging offensive. What mattered more than the ratio of forces on both sides was the capability of NATO's posture to perform the operational missions that are associated with a forward defense. These missions include coverage of the front line in adequate density and the use of reserves and counterconcentration tactics to contain localized penetrations. Planning factors traditionally associated with these missions have been based not only on the enemy threat, but also on assessments of the terrain, density standards, force-to-space relationships, and operational doctrine. When added together, these planning factors have consistently suggested that NATO's posture could be smaller than the Warsaw Pact's and still be adequate for the Alliance's strategy.

When judged by this theory of requirements, NATO's buildup in the 1960s clearly had an important operational effect. In 1959 NATO had enough ground forces in Central Europe (or available within a month) to mount a plausible conventional defense effort. But it did not have enough forces, especially early in the mobilization process, to establish and hold a strong front line along the inter-German border for any period of time. Even after three months of mobilization, it still would have lacked depth and staying power. As a result, in almost any plausible scenario it would have been compelled to conduct a mobile defense in retrograde. In other words, it would have had to retreat steadily and to use mobile tactics to defend itself. In all likelihood, NATO's forces would have been driven back to the Rhine River, and perhaps further. NATO thus could not have conducted a sustained forward defense of the sort envisioned by MC 14/3. If it had attempted a forward defense, nuclear escalation would have been necessary very early.

By 1969, this situation had changed appreciably. Enough NATO forces were then present in Central Europe to establish a solid front line within a few days. Moreover, NATO was capable of adding depth to its posture within two or three months. As a result, NATO had become physically capable of mounting not only a conventional



defense, but a forward defense as well. Absent being caught by surprise, NATO was not compelled by any early lack of forces to resort immediately to mobile tactics and retrograde operations, or to escalate promptly. And if given enough time to fully mobilize by deploying U.S. reserves to Europe, it had the physical capacity to establish the kind of stalwart defense that could not readily be dislodged even by a full-fledged Warsaw Pact attack. For the first time in its history, the issue was no longer one of total assets, but rather relative mobilization and buildup rates.

To be sure, NATO's posture in the early stages of mobilization still fell short of the 50-60 divisions needed for an ideal defense, and even below the 40-50 divisions needed for an "initial" defense. NATO's deficiency was especially marked during the critical first month of mobilization, but its forces were now close enough to the required level to ensure that they no longer could easily be pushed off the continent, especially if the Warsaw Pact failed to mobilize quickly. Moreover, since war is a matter of probabilities rather than certainties, NATO's forces had become strong enough to raise genuine doubts in Moscow about the likelihood that an attack against the West would succeed at all. NATO's forces thus had done more than merely grow in a linear, quantitative sense. In operational terms, they had ascended onto a higher plateau and thereby altered the deterrence equation in Europe.

This achievement did not mean that NATO had solved all of its defense problems. It still remained vulnerable, particularly if the Soviets successfully did mobilize quickly, attack, and wear down NATO's defenses before the Alliance's own mobilization effort had built up steam. Given NATO's likely hesitancy to mobilize early in a crisis, this was a contingency that could not be discounted. Indeed, NATO's military planners were inclined to assume that NATO, in fact, would mobilize in a sluggish way. In succeeding years, this assumption was to become embedded in NATO's planning.

The task of mobilizing and reinforcing quickly, however, did not appear to be an easy one for the Soviets themselves to accomplish. Only some 27 Soviet divisions were deployed near the inter-German border in peacetime. Even if the Soviets were to draw on highly ready East European forces nearby, they would have been able to attack after a few days with only about 40 divisions. As Table 10 shows, this hardly seemed enough for confidence that NATO's forces could be easily overwhelmed. Consequently, the Soviets would have had to mobilize at least the 20 additional East European divisions nearby. Even that, however, would have yielded a Warsaw Pact advantage of only

Table 10  
ALTERNATIVE BUILDUP PROFILES: 1969<sup>a</sup>  
(WP:NATO ratio)

40-Division Attack	60-Division Attack	90-Division Attack
1.2:1	1.2-1.4:1	2.0-1.2:1

<sup>a</sup>My estimate based on a standard planning scenario in which NATO mobilizes a few days after the Warsaw Pact.

1.2-1.4:1, depending upon reinforcement rates on both sides. As a result, mobilization of all the 33 Soviet reserve divisions based in the Baltic, Byelorussian, and Carpathian military districts would probably have been necessary. If done very quickly, this would have enabled the Soviets to achieve a 2:1 advantage. Most of these units, however, were maintained in low readiness status and would have required a period of refresher training before moving forward. In addition, the physical act of transporting them to the forward areas by road and rail seemed likely to be time consuming. Exactly how much time few Western analysts pretended to know. But it seemed likely to be a matter of weeks, and perhaps months, rather than days, all of which would work to NATO's advantage. At the time, a Warsaw Pact attack around M+30 seemed the most likely scenario: The force ratio by then would have been down to 1.7:1 if NATO mobilized quickly. In the extreme case of a very slow Warsaw Pact buildup, the Soviets would probably have found themselves with only a 1.2:1 overall advantage and opposing them a large, well-prepared NATO posture of 52 divisions.

As the 1960s drew to a close, much uncertainty remained about the conventional military balance in Europe, including the thorny issue of relative buildup rates. Nonetheless, one thing was clear: NATO was in a better position than had been the case only ten years before. Whether NATO's forces, in fact, could withstand a full Warsaw Pact attack without resorting to nuclear weapons was still a controversial matter. But for the first time in NATO's history, the balance had become close enough to render this issue an object of intensive analysis, scrutiny, and debate. This alone was an important accomplishment. It meant that while NATO still could not feel fully confident of its military posture, neither could the Warsaw Pact. As NATO knew well, the risks that the Kremlin now found itself facing would probably produce the kind of hesitant, cautious behavior that MC 14/3 was aimed at.

NATO's progress during his tenure led McNamara to conclude, in his final official DoD posture statement in 1968, that while the risks in Europe were far from entirely eliminated, NATO's posture in Central Europe was now generally adequate to deter and defend against a Soviet attack. This appraisal partially reflected his own downgrading of the Warsaw Pact threat and his doubts that a Soviet attack could be mounted quickly. But it also reflected satisfaction on his part with the size and configuration of NATO's forces in Europe as well as U.S. reinforcement capabilities. The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, SACEUR, and Allied military authorities did not fully share in this optimism about either the threat or NATO's prospects, but they also did recognize, and acknowledge, that the situation had changed importantly over the past decade.

The issue dividing McNamara from his military advisors was not a matter of victory or defeat, or adequacy versus inadequacy. Rather, it was the kind of disagreement that regularly arises between managers of defense programs and seasoned professionals who lead troops into battle. It was a result of differing technical analysis, judgment, interpretation, and emphasis. It also was a product of dissimilar approaches to handling uncertainty: whether appraisals should be based on how a war most likely would transpire or instead on conservative standards that recognize the unexpected can occur and things can go wrong. For these reasons, it ultimately boiled down to a matter of confidence levels and insurance. Neither McNamara nor the military embraced an extreme judgment one way or the other. McNamara felt more confident about NATO's posture, and the military, less.<sup>2</sup>

The truth of the matter probably lay somewhere between their differing appraisals. Especially at the time, U.S. and Allied professional officers had a reputation for being too pessimistic about the West's defense prospects. At the same time, McNamara's own assessments were probably too sanguine. McNamara and his OSD analysts tended to dwell on force levels and time-phased force generation rates. This approach led them to overlook a host of less visible, but still important deficiencies in NATO's posture. Examples are NATO's lack of standardization and interoperability, inadequate ammunition stocks and war reserves, inadequate strategic lift, a redundant but inefficient logistic support system, a cumbersome command system, and other liabilities stemming from the need to fight as a coalition. These deficiencies were to rise to prominence in the 1970s, when they became focal points of two major NATO efforts—AD-70 and the

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<sup>2</sup>See McNamara's annual reports and congressional testimony, 1966–1968.

Long Term Defense Plan—designed to solve them. Because they would have retarded NATO's performance in the 1960s, NATO's defense prospects probably were not as good as McNamara implied, even if they were not as bad as the military concluded.

Moreover, McNamara's analysis was focused primarily on the Central Region and said little about the flanks or the maritime balance. At the time, the U.S. and British navies still dominated the sea and NATO was not yet concerned about the Soviet naval challenge. This situation was to begin changing a few years later as the Soviets began deploying a blue water navy capable of interdicting NATO's seaborne supply lines in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. Meanwhile, the situation on the flanks, an important but chronically overlooked issue, was more precarious than in Central Europe. In particular, both Northern Norway and Turkey lay exposed to Soviet military power in ways that NATO could not readily offset. These considerations need to be factored into any appraisal of NATO's conventional defense prospects.

Both McNamara and the military, their differences aside, broadly concurred on the agenda facing NATO in the future. McNamara openly argued that NATO's forces still needed further strengthening in many areas. He favored a moderate set of improvements that would be economically affordable and politically feasible. In justifying this stance, he said that NATO's buildup since 1961 had placed the Alliance within striking range of a fully adequate posture. Senior military officers did not dispute this appraisal, but they wanted more ambitious programs than McNamara was recommending, and they said so. However, they also expressed willingness to work with what they could get in the confidence that NATO's forces were no longer hopelessly weak and that NATO's strategy was a viable military proposition.

The Johnson administration thus came to an end with Pentagon civilian and military leaders in agreement on the basic programmatic issue. The challenge now facing NATO was whether it could maintain its unity to the point where the programs and budgets needed to achieve these improvements would be forthcoming. As the Nixon administration entered office in 1969—NATO's 20th birthday—it found itself squarely confronting this troublesome but far from hopeless issue.

### **XIII. LESSONS LEARNED**

The 1960s were a decade of debate for NATO, but also of decisions and progress. The Alliance argued stressfully over its military strategy and forces and emerged with its nerves frayed and one of its key members sitting sullenly on the sidelines. Yet the Alliance also emerged with agreement on a new, better military strategy and with an improved defense posture—nuclear and conventional—that far more adequately protected the West's interests in Europe. Out of NATO's decisions on strategy and forces flowed a stream of positive political consequences that made themselves felt not only in the 1960s but also in the two decades to follow. These decisions by no means solved all of NATO's problems. But because of them, NATO's internal wounds largely healed and its members began finding mutual confidence where there had previously been doubt. Equally important, these decisions helped stabilize previously tense East-West relations in Europe and set the stage for a process of accommodation, on terms favorable to the West, that began in the 1970s and then accelerated when Gorbachev assumed power in the mid-1980s.

The strategy of flexible response, with the agreements on nuclear sharing, employment concepts, and force goals that underpinned it, stands out as NATO's most publicly visible accomplishment in this decade. But NATO's less-visible progress on actually building a stronger conventional posture was important as well. A simple analogy, one that compares NATO's efforts to the process of building a house, best characterizes the nature of this progress. The 1950s saw NATO lay the foundations for a viable conventional posture, but little more. The 1960s were to see NATO build on this foundation by erecting the main beams, girders, wall supports, and roof. This progress, in turn, provided the framework for additional efforts by NATO in the 1970s and 1980s to carry the job further toward completion.

Why were these gains achieved and what lessons can be derived from this period? While a large number of factors were at work, it is clear that these achievements would not have been accomplished had the United States not exerted decisive leadership within the Alliance. During this period, the United States refused to remain content with an unsatisfactory military strategy out of fear of stirring up trouble with its allies and reluctance to make things difficult for itself. Instead, it set sights on ambitious goals,

embarked on a concerted effort to attain them, and showed a penchant for clear strategic thought. In the process, it wisely accepted temporary controversy and strain as the price for achieving enduring security. Along the way, it stumbled several times and suffered some setbacks. But in the end, it emerged with much of what it had sought, and the Alliance as a whole benefited from the outcome.

While this outcome was a product of the efforts of two presidential administrations and the national security bureaucracies that served them, Robert McNamara deserves a special share of the credit. His relentless determination to think clearly and to manage intelligently helped reform not only the Pentagon but also the entire NATO Alliance. He left the Department of Defense with his reputation scarred by Vietnam and his political capital spent. But he also left behind the strategy of flexible response, a NATO force posture capable of supporting this strategy, and an alliance with well-established planning mechanisms. Beyond question, this is a positive legacy, one that few have aspired to achieve, much less actually attained.

The lesson here is that American leadership of the Alliance is often needed and is seldom easy. Also, leadership is not measured by the absence of strain; normally controversy is its bedfellow, a price that must be paid for progress to occur. By the same token, political equilibrium—especially when it exists on the surface alone—is not necessarily an indicator of internal health. It can be a sign of decay, and ferment can be an engine of renewal. The United States was able to recognize the distinguishing features of wise leadership: vision, courage, and energy. Because it did so, the Alliance emerged the better for the exercise. It entered the 1960s with its security at question and its unity at risk. It exited the decade with its security far better intact and many of the cracks in its foundation mended.

Not all of the credit goes to the United States. Success was achieved because NATO functioned as a true coalition: one constantly at war within itself, but also driven by a shared interest in reaching sound decisions. Many of the Allies deserve a fair share of the credit for this outcome. This particularly is true for the Federal Republic of Germany. In the 1950s, it emerged phoenix-like from the ashes of its Nazi predecessor and gradually gained a reputation as responsible, stable, westward-anchored democracy. In the 1960s, it reacted uncertainly at first to the winds of strategy change blowing from across the Atlantic. But in the end, it maintained its anchor in NATO and worked cooperatively with the United States to gain accord on a new military strategy that served

the enduring interests of both nations. Equally important, in a quiet and uncredited way, it fielded the military forces that made conventional defense and flexible response possible. West Germany was soon to come under attack for its pursuit of Ostpolitik and its failure to measure up better on some burden-sharing accounts, but the central strategic reality here is as simple as it is obvious. Without West Germany's pro-NATO behavior and its large military contribution, neither Central Europe nor the United States would have enjoyed nearly as much security as was the case during these years.

Similarly complimentary things should be said about several other NATO Allies whose contributions are easily overlooked in appraisals that see little but friction, self-serving behavior, and short-sightedness in the Alliance. Britain was continuously bedeviled by fiscal constraints on its defense spending, but it wisely steered a steady course by nurturing its ties with the United States and seeking a contributing role on the continent. The same should be said about Belgium and the Netherlands. Both of them continued to contribute small but critically important forces to NATO's defense posture. Equally important, they were voices of moderation and compromise within NATO's circles. Playing an often-ignored but always important role in NATO's deliberations, they helped steer the Alliance toward unity and a sound military strategy.

None of this is to imply that either the United States or the Allies had unblemished records during these years. The United States made many tactical errors in Alliance management and perhaps a few strategic blunders. Often it behaved too unilaterally, without due regard for Allied sensitivities and the need for advance consultation. Sometimes it sought too much, too quickly. And its larger visions for West European integration and transatlantic relations often were curiously blind to the goals of key allies, especially France. In later years, the United States was able to correct many of these shortcomings by behaving more patiently within NATO and by treating France with greater respect. But its errors of the 1960s spawned a negative reaction across Western Europe, one that hampered its own efforts to lead the Alliance.

The West European allies also come away from this period with a mixed scorecard. Many, including West Germany, reacted too negatively and suspiciously to early U.S. efforts to bring about strategy reform. To the extent that a damaging debate ensued, it was partly a product of their own shortsightedness. Also, several nations proved willing to accept the benefits of American nuclear protection and flexible response while not living up to their obligations and responsibilities. In the seeds of this

failure were planted American disatisfactions that led to the burden-sharing debate, which already had started in 1969 and was to grow in future years.

France's behavior in the 1960s especially will be a subject of debate among historians and policy analysts. Although de Gaulle's emotions are understandable, his vision for Europe and transatlantic relations was neither healthy nor achievable. To compound things, his withdrawal from NATO's integrated military structure unnecessarily damaged the Alliance, the United States, and other West European nations, all of which were playing an important role in protecting France's security. On the positive side, France regularly sided with the United States and NATO in moments of crisis and continued to provide many of the military forces that NATO's strategy required. De Gaulle's legacy is best measured by the behavior of his successors, all of whom have slowly but surely tried to steer France back in the direction of the Alliance and the United States.

Another lesson that stands out clearly from this period is the extent to which nuclear and conventional defense issues were intertwined in Alliance politics and strategy. The simple fact is that progress in one area was necessary for progress to occur in the other. The United States would have been unlikely to continue tying its nuclear forces so closely to Western Europe's defense had the Allies not been amenable to flexible response. The Allies would not have accepted MC 14/3 and its conventional defense concepts had the United States not provided proper reassurances that led to a satisfactory nuclear sharing arrangement.

Neither side of the Atlantic seemed to recognize this interconnection at the outset of NATO's strategy debate. But both sides ultimately came to realize it. As a result, they were able to fashion a political settlement, anchored on the principle of adequacy in both nuclear and conventional forces, that laid the basis for further progress in later years.

Whether the evolving security situation in Europe will continue to demand MC 14/3 and its present force posture is uncertain. As the Warsaw Pact threat declines, NATO may be able to relax its defenses in one way or another, and perhaps to a degree that few would have dreamed possible only a short while ago. But a NATO Alliance, with a conscious military strategy of some sort, will probably continue being needed. Regardless of what strategy turns out to be appropriate, one thing seems likely to remain



true. Because multiple interests and objectives will continue being involved, nuclear and conventional defense issues will remain intertwined. The Alliance will be best advised not to lose sight of this core feature of modern military strategy, and coalition politics.

Finally, a great imponderable about NATO's military policy in the 1960s period is its effect on relations with the Soviet bloc. Beyond question, the United States and NATO acted out of their own self-interest, pragmatically defined, in their decisions to adopt flexible response and to build a stronger defense posture in Central Europe. Underpinning these decisions were the sensible assumptions that the Soviet Union was a hostile power bent on expansion and that the cause of stability was best served by a Western policy of firmness. At issue, therefore, are not the motivations behind NATO's decisions, but rather their practical consequences.

The major line of criticism directed at the West is that its defense policy in the 1960s triggered an upward spiral in the arms race and dampened prospects for an earlier détente in Europe. While the truth of the matter lies buried in Soviet archives, it is clear that the Soviets, in fact, did embark on a major military buildup shortly after the United States began strengthening its nuclear forces and NATO began moving toward flexible response. What is less clear is whether NATO's actions triggered this step, or whether the Soviets would have taken it in any event. The historical sequencing of actions on both sides plausibly suggests that the Soviets at least partially were responding to the United States and NATO. Weighing against a full acceptance of this thesis, however, are three important strategic facts. First, the West was not indifferent to arms control in this period. Indeed, it actively pursued the course of negotiations even as it bolstered its defenses. Second, the West stopped well short of pursuing the kind of military programs that would have posed a serious threat to the Soviet Union, including a major ABM system and much larger conventional forces in Central Europe. Third, the Soviet Union's military programs, especially its buildup in Central Europe, went well beyond the standards normally associated with purely defensive intent. These facts suggest that while the West might not be completely innocent of blame in this period, neither was the Soviet Union. In essence, Gorbachev and other Soviet analysts have admitted as much in recent years.

The diplomatic events of this period also are instructive. Before NATO's military buildup, Western Europe was a focal point of one dangerous crisis after another. These crises normally were brought about by ceaseless Soviet efforts to upset the status quo at

the West's expense. In the wake of NATO's buildup, Soviet diplomacy did a remarkable about face. The Soviets began pursuing détente, crises became a thing of the past, the Cold War began cooling, and the security problems facing NATO, while still daunting, became less severe. This political record suggests that the correlation between NATO's military resolve and the stabilizing of Central Europe is more than casual.

To be sure, the Soviet Union's pursuit of détente was accompanied by a relentless military modernization program that suggested a desire to restore the Warsaw Pact's military supremacy in Europe and perhaps Soviet nuclear superiority over the United States as well. But the military foundation laid by NATO in the 1960s enabled the United States and its allies to checkmate many of the Soviet Union's improvements by pursuing a course of moderate, affordable defense measures of their own. In its relentless desire to keep ahead in its military competition with the more wealthy NATO nations, the Soviet government essentially ignored quality of life in its own country and allied nations, while bankrupting itself. The result in the late 1980s was a shattering defeat for Socialism, one that spawned Gorbachev's reforms and may yet bring about a historical change in the European security order.

If this turns out to be the legacy of NATO's defense policy in the 1960s and thereafter, then the Alliance will have served itself and the larger cause of stability well. And even if reform in the Eastern Bloc fails and the Cold War returns, the West's actions will probably go down in history as prudent, if not farsighted. In any event, the 1960s saw a great deal of debate, stress, and struggle within NATO, but they also saw courageous decisions and strong actions, most of which have thus far endured the test of time.

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